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Call to address 'emptiness' leading to epidemic of drug addiction

Chai Brady
A former drug addict-turned-counsellor, who shared his experiences with Pope Francis, has warned that any discussion about liberalising drug laws must also focus on the "cocaine-fuelled violence" which is gripping parishes across Ireland.
Working out of Cuan Mhuire's addiction centre in Athy, Co. Kildare, Damian Richardson – who spoke of his experiences of addiction before the Pope and tens of thousands of pilgrims at the World Meeting of Families in Croke Park in 2018 – warned of the devastating impact of illegal drugs that he experiences on a daily basis.
It comes as the first meeting of a citizens' assembly on drugs took place, with many campaigners calling for liberalisation on the laws around drugs.
"You go into any A&E at the weekend, it will be packed with young and old people having psychotic episodes because of these drugs they're taking. Whether you legalise this or not, the effects are still the same – drugs affect people whether the Government approve of it or not...there has to be a different solution out there," he told *The Irish Catholic*.
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In Sr Clare's care...



Karleen, Caycee, Ken and Martin Crockett – family of Derry nun Sr Clare Crockett, who died in an earthquake seven years ago – are pictured attending the annual Sr Clare retreat held in Long Tower, Derry, April 17. Photo: Jim McCafferty.

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What to do with a problem like Joe...

Joe Biden's handlers can hardly have been more pleased about his 'homecoming' visit to Ireland. By any measure, the trip was a success and Mr Biden certainly seems to have enjoyed himself.

A US-based journalist commenting on the trip pointed out that the crowds who turned out to see Mr Biden outside St Muredach's Cathedral were bigger than the sort of crowds that the US president regularly attracts on his actual home turf.

Mr Biden speaks passionately – and often – about his Catholic Faith. And in visiting Knock Shrine in Co. Mayo, the president certainly brought a lot of attention to the national Marian and Eucharistic shrine.

Who can have been left unmoved by the experience of the elderly Mr Biden meeting the priest who gave the last sacraments of the Church to his son Beau who died of glioblastoma in 2015, at the age of 46.

According to the parish priest of Knock Fr Richard Gibbons, Mr Biden was so moved by the experience and the link with that great tragedy in his life that the president was moved to tears.

Mr Biden's public

Catholicism is not without controversy. In the US, senior prelates have clashed with one another over what to do about the incongruity of Mr Biden's stated faith and his increasingly aggressive and hard-line pro-abortion stance. Just days before touching down in Ireland, Mr Biden took to social media to affirm his strong commitment to women having the right to end the life of their unborn child.

Journey

Not unlike many of our own politicians, he has been on a journey. Mr Biden says that he started out as a pro-lifer, then came to reluctantly accept that abortion was the law of the land, even if he wasn't supportive of it. In recent years, however, he has become a trenchant supporter of abortion.

US bishops have discussed what to do about the obvious scandal of people like President Biden and other public Catholics like Nancy Pelosi presenting themselves for Holy Communion at Mass while clearly being out of com-

munion with the Church and rejecting a tenet of the Catholic moral teaching so basic as the right to life.

In the case of Ms Pelosi, her own bishop has asked priests to deny her the Sacrament. Yet, weeks after that she received Holy Communion while on a visit to the Vatican.

The Pope and many bishops have spoken about the need to be in dialogue with pro-abortion Catholic politicians rather than utterly rejecting or alienating them. The dilemma needs, many argue, a process of pastoral accompaniment whereby the politician is brought to understand the sanctity of human life.

Which is, of course, a good approach. But what about the 80-year-old Mr Biden? Or the 83-year-old Ms Pelosi? They can hardly be unaware of the teaching of the Church on the issue of abortion. Likewise, since they have provoked public controversy on the issue and have been spoken to by many priests and bishops about it, they surely cannot say that no-one has tried to explain the incompatibility of their politics with their faith.

The issue is not confined to America, of course. Many pro-abortion Irish politicians regularly present themselves for Holy Communion. Apart from a couple of isolated cases, none have been refused.

It is a huge conundrum for the Church. At one

Editor's Comment

Michael Kelly



level, the Eucharist is real food for us to help us on our journey to God. It is not a reward for good behaviour, but the very gift of God himself to make us whole.

At the same time, Holy Communion presumes communion of mind and heart with God and the Church. It does not presume that one leaves the sanctuary and then goes to promote things at odds with our shared Christian Faith. St Augustine put it thus: "Behold who you are, become what you receive!"

Divisions

For Catholics, the Eucharist is no tokenistic meal where we set aside divisions for a brief period on a Sunday morning and then go back to our partisan ghettos. The Eucharist is real Communion, and it should be a source of great sadness for all of us when someone who professes the Catholic Faith promotes a way of living and seeing the world that is so at odds with the Christian vision.

At the same time, we need to model Christ in our welcome and outreach to people. Fr Gibbons did exactly this at Knock, and we should separate that wholly from the issue of the Eucharist. Knock is a place where heaven touched earth, and it is a place of spiritual renewal and conversion.

It has seen miracles in times past, may we have the faith to see them again and pray for the grace of conversion.

Call to address 'emptiness' leading to epidemic of drug addiction

» Continued from Page 1

"How many deaths have we had over the years through suicide, through heroin and other overdoses?" he asked.

He added: "There's a deeper issue in society, why do people need to block the world out? Why do they need to take pills, cocaine, and cannabis? What is the emptiness they're living through? And it is an emptiness."

"Look at any of the main cities – in Dublin, the cocaine-fuelled violence on the weekend is unreal – we're still going to have that," he said of the prospect of legalising some drugs.

The addiction counsellor believes illegal drug users are searching for deeper meaning in their lives.

"Unfortunately this is society today, drugs give people escapism. Why are people unhappy? We have all the material needs that other generations hadn't got, but suicide, mental health, crime is out the door, it's crazy," he said.

The citizens' assembly on drugs use is made up of 100 people and began its work at the weekend. It was established to consider legislative, policy and operational changes that supporters say could "significantly reduce the harmful impacts of illicit drugs on individuals, families, communities and wider Irish society".

It will look at the effects of different drug policies internationally, and their impact and consider the lived experience of people impacted by drug use.

Mr Richardson told *The Irish Catholic* that "debate and dialogue is always good". However, he warned: "I just have concerns coming from many years of an addiction background, that whatever comes to light that it's the right decision and it doesn't harm our young people anymore".

While legalising drugs may "hit drug cartels in the pocket", he said, "the same effects are still going to be there".

"The effects of drugs on the everyday young person will still happen – not getting educated by dropping out of school, mental health issues, the violence, people attacking each other outside Temple

Bar," he said.

He added that while there is strong lobbying in Ireland for the legalisation of cannabis, he believes from conversations with young people he works with that it is a "gateway drug" that leads users to heavier illegal drug use.

He said that if a substance is "a mind altering or mood-altering substance, why do people need to be taking it? It should be up to doctors if you need legal drugs. I think there's an epidemic of addiction in Ireland".

Mr Richardson joined the Cenacolo Community in 2002, which specialises in assisting people give up drugs. Because of their intervention he recovered from his heroin addiction.

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Knock shrine 'welcomes all' rector says after President Joe Biden visit

Chai Brady

The rector of Knock Shrine has said they were "very happy" to welcome US President Joe Biden as a pilgrim for private prayer, despite his political policy on abortion.

President Biden believes abortion is a 'right' and has continuously promised to introduce 'abortion protections' into US law

following the overturning of Roe vs Wade which gave individual states the power to make their own legislative decisions regarding abortion.

He has also said he does not believe the Church's teaching that life begins at conception.

However, Fr Richard Gibbons said his visit was private and they can't turn pilgrims away as it is against the point of a shrine.

"He wanted to come in privacy

for his own prayer. We're not policemen of who comes to the shrine, the shrine is open for anybody to come at any particular point in time and they're always welcomed as a pilgrim," Fr Gibbons said.

"He came as a pilgrim, we received him as a pilgrim, and anything else after that is between himself and the Lord, otherwise we'd be policing people at the borders of the shrine

and that is not what a shrine is about," he said, "We don't know the status of anybody that comes to the shrine in terms of their relationship with the Lord and that's the whole point of a shrine, it's a place you should be able to feel you are welcome to come."

Fr Gibbons added that it was a great opportunity for the shrine to reach a wider international audience.

He said: "It's incredible in

terms of the attention that it brought to the shrine itself, since Pope Francis elevated it to international status we were wondering what to do after Covid and this is one of the biggest opportunities in terms of getting the shrine's recognition out there... to be that centre where people can come and pray and be at peace so we're very, very happy with that."

i See pages 10-11

Dublin diocese wards off Baptism lawsuits with new policy

Ruadhán Jones

Dublin diocese has updated its privacy policy to defend itself from lawsuits under the right to privacy and GDPR laws.

Some dioceses, including Archbishop Dermot Farrell's former diocese of Ossory, have faced complaints from individuals alleging their rights were being breached by the dioceses keeping their baptismal certificate after requests for them to be destroyed.

The Data Protection Commission has completed an

inquiry into the issue, the DPC's annual report for 2022 reveals, with a decision to be published at a later date.

The archdiocese's new privacy policy, published on its website, states that baptismal certificates must be kept "in perpetuity" as they are needed for participation in further sacraments such as marriage or ordination.

Previously, dioceses' have argued that baptismal records may be kept due to their historical significance.

It is "essential that the archbishop maintains a record of certain sacraments

which may only be administered once in the Roman Catholic Church", the new privacy policy states.

Baptism registers are annotated upon administration of the sacraments of Confirmation, Marriage or Holy Orders, the dioceses states, adding that this is necessary as the sacraments can only be undertaken once during a person's lifetime.

It stresses that data processing is carried out with appropriate safeguards and relates "solely to members or former members of the Roman Catholic Church".

Minister Foley inundated with concerned letters about sex education changes

Staff reporter

Minister for Education Norma Foley received hundreds of letters from parents, teachers, school principals and medical professionals over plans to reform sex education in primary and secondary schools.

The letters question plans for children to be taught about subjects including masturbation, pornography and consent, according to

The Sunday Independent.

In one letter a primary school teacher questions teacher-training videos referenced in NCCA resources for the junior cycle, which instruct teachers "how to socially transition a primary child from a girl to a boy".

The letters are in response to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) plan to update Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

curriculum in primary and secondary schools.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* in March, after the NCCA had dropped a "gender spectrum" learning outcome from the proposed curriculum, the Catholic Education Partnership said parents "will be satisfied that they communicated to the NCCA through the consultation process have been attended to".

Contemplating God's mercy...



Éabha Barrett, Tralee, is blessed with the Blessed Sacrament by Fr Francis Nolan on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 16, in St John's Church Tralee, Co. Kerry. Photo: John Cleary.



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Church ‘wobbling’ over women deacons a scandal, theologian tells TCD gathering

Ruadhán Jones

The Church’s “wobbling” over the question of ordaining women to the diaconate is a scandal, a leading theologian told a symposium at Trinity College Dublin.

There “is not now and never has been any doctrinal finding that women cannot be ordained to the diaconate”, said Dr Phyllis Zagano, an expert on women in the diaconate.

Dr Zagano criticised those who dismiss

requests for “the restoration of women to the ordained diaconate... as one of ‘women’s rights’, insinuating it is a political discussion”.

“Justice means justice for the people of God, not only for women. It is about ministry. It is about women deacons. It is about women being ministered to by women.”

She added later that “No picketing is necessary. This is not a political discussion.”

In the context of the ongoing synodal pathway, Dr Zagano said that “we must admit today, and tomorrow and the next day, that women can

receive the Sacrament of order as deacons, just as they did for hundreds of years in the Church, from the inception of the formalisation of ordination, with its attendant liturgies, until at least the 12th Century”.

Dr Zagano served on a Vatican commission to explore the ordination of women to the diaconate between 2016 and 2018. A report on the proceedings was forwarded to the Pope by Cardinal Luis Ladaria.

However, none of the participants have seen the papers, Dr Zagano said.

In May 2019, Pope Francis told reporters that the commission was inconclusive about whether female deacons in the early Church were “ordained” or formally “blessed”.

“What is fundamental is that there was no certainty that there was an ordination with the same form and same aim as the ordination of men,” the Pope told reporters flying with him from North Macedonia to Rome on May 7, 2019.

In 2020, Francis instituted a new commission to study the possibility of women deacons.

INTO criticises ‘insensitive’ opposition to gender ideology in primaries

Jason Osborne

The recent Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) conference saw delegates criticise “insensitive comments” made by school management bodies expressing opposition to teaching controversial gender ideology.

Early March saw the Catholic

Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) say that teaching primary school students about transgenderism “would be counterproductive, generating unnecessary divisions in school communities” and that it would add to “a growing psychological contagion amongst young and vulnerable children”.

Delegates at the INTO’s annual

congress in Killarney “condemned” the CPSMA’s comments and welcomed what they called a “timely review” of the 20-year-old relationships and sexual education curriculum.

At the same congress, INTO forbade a motion that expressed ‘serious concerns’ about the teaching of gender ideology to young children

from being discussed.

Gript reported that the motion was forwarded for consideration by the Gorey branch of the INTO, but was ruled to be ‘out of order’ for breaching unspecified rules and for being non-inclusive.

The INTO Standing Orders Committee told the Gorey branch that the motion would not be considered

as it breached the rules and objectives of the INTO and that it didn’t uphold the ‘inclusive nature’ of the INTO.

The Gorey branch wished to express “serious concerns in relation to the proposed changes to the RSE curriculum, with the introduction of Gender Ideology, as proposed by the NCCA”.

Clonard hosts recommitment service to peace-making



US Special Envoy Joe Kennedy III (centre) with Archbishop Eamon Martin (far right) and Church of Ireland Archbishop John McDowell (far left) and US Consul General Paul Narain at Corrymeela’s recommitment at a service in Clonard Monastery, Belfast, that featured members of WAVE Trauma’s Towards Inclusion choir, on April 16.

Staff reporter

Clonard Redemptorist monastery, Belfast – which was at the centre of peace-making efforts during the Troubles – hosted a “recommitment service” on Sunday, April 16.

Community leaders, clerics and

political dignitaries including US Special Envoy Joseph Kennedy III, joined in tribute to peace workers who were inspired by their faith, 25 years on from the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

“Here people connect their faith with the work of peace and with creating a future that works not just

for some, but for all” said Rev. Alex Wimberley of Corrymeela Community, who hosted the event.

Peace

“Today we remember those who were inspired by their faith to work for a more peaceful future.”

A number of guest speakers tes-

tified to the importance of faith in driving their desire for peace, including Rev. Harold Good, who with Fr Alec Reid CSsR oversaw the final decommissioning of weapons.

A number of young people reflected on the importance of peace to them and of the need for a functioning government.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Charity announces large response to Haiti crisis

Charity Goal aim to target the worsening humanitarian crisis in Haiti as political instability and rampant gang violence are complicating dire levels of food insecurity and hunger as a cholera outbreak spreads across the country.

The charity say that more than five million people are in need of urgent assistance.

Earlier this month the UN launched an appeal for \$720 million (€656 million) to support more than three million people in Haiti, its largest response since the 2010 earthquake.

“The imperative now is to save lives and safeguard basic food security and health in an extremely difficult environment,” said Bernard McCaul, GOAL’s Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).



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A pro-baby movement from Silicon Valley

If Florence, Paris, or Rome were, at various times in the progress of European civilisation the central source of influence or ideas, the equivalent in today's world might be Silicon Valley in California. This is where nearly all the tech revolutions have launched, and to which we owe that gadget in our pockets – the smart phone – which now controls everything from our banking to our family snaps.

The next new idea from Silicon Valley might surprise: the appearance of a pro-natalist organisation which seeks to encourage the developed world into a positive attitude to having more births.

Pronatalist.org is run by a pair of progressive entrepreneurs in their 30s, Malcolm and Simone Collins, whose mission is to have as many children as they can – they already have three; and to be energetic influencers on others to “go forth and multiply”, as the Bible suggests.

Except that Malcolm and Simone are emphatic



Mary Kenny



Simone and Malcolm Collins with Octavian and Torsten.

about not associating themselves or their Pronatalist Foundation with religious or political movements. Their ideology is, they say, entirely rationalist, based on the data they have collected: virtually every advanced country in the world is now on a dangerous slope of declining fertility. With rare exceptions, that magic number of 2.1 children per woman necessary for population replacement is seriously under par.

The Pronatalist Founda-

tion's goals are:

- Creating support for modern mothers,
- Building co-parenting communities,
- Innovative cultural techniques to slow fertility decline, and
- Fighting to support both traditional and non-traditional families.

They are endorsed by the world's richest man, Elon Musk (father of ten), who has described population collapse as “the biggest danger to humanity”, and a range of pronatalist experts and even techie organisations.

Pro-life Catholics and Christians won't be aligned with all the values advanced by this modern pro-natalist movement: surrogacy and even artificial wombs are envisaged by some adherents. But it's significant, all the same, when those who set the lifestyle trends in fashionable thinking are flagging up

the fact that babies should be welcome, and that we need them. Also, that parents need to be supported by social and financial solutions, as well as community solidarity.

The Collins' predictions on the impact of declining birth rates are very striking. They warn of declines in equality, collapse of financial markets, a rise in more anti-social behaviour. There's an impressive amount of such information and data accessible via Pronatalist.org.

Not everyone's vocation is to be a parent, but functioning societies certainly need births. It's fascinating to see this message coming to us from such an ultra-modern location.

I've visited Iceland three times, so I was drawn to the much-praised Danish movie *Godland*, set in the rugged Icelandic landscape in the 19th Century.

A young Lutheran pastor, Lucas (Elliot Crosset Hove) starts out to build a church in the remote south-west of the island. He is also a keen photographer – like Fr Browne, SJ, who took memorable photos on the Titanic – and he lugs his cumbersome Victorian photography equipment with him. He also brings a life-sized cross.

The movie vividly portrays the harsh conditions which Lucas faces: a treeless terrain of fierce volcanoes, relentless snow, driving rain and harsh wind. If you wanted a fish supper, you fished for it in icy waters, if you wanted a mutton dinner, you killed and eviscerated a sheep. Travel was on horseback, with pack animals in tow.

Despite his best intentions, the endeavour is too much for him. The pastor builds the church, but his own demons overwhelm him and it all ends in violence, like a Nordic noir.

Godland depicts how life must have been in a tough territory, with simple pleasures as a relief – a country dance, fire-side storytelling. The greener patches of Iceland are not unlike Connemara – grazing grass amidst stones. And it did make me think of those men and women who have sallied forth into inhospitable places to evangelise and what they endured. (*Godland* is currently showing at the Irish Film Institute.)

The Irish-American axis

There were many complaints on social media about the British media's coverage of President Joe Biden's visit to Ireland. And it was somewhat mean-spirited and shallow. Grumbles about the presidential car not flying the Union Jack in Belfast were silly: everyone knows that flags are a sensitive, even inflammatory, issue in Northern Ireland.

The truth is that the 'Anglo-Saxons' – as the French call the British-American axis – had, for decades, an almost monopoly relationship. Churchill, half-American himself, forged a close wartime bond with Roosevelt; Margaret Thatcher and Ronnie Reagan were joined at the political hip.

The Irish didn't have much leverage in Washington until

Jack Kennedy's ascent in 1960 – FDR wouldn't even see Dublin envoy Robert Brennan. But Ireland's 'soft power' has increased through deft diplomatic manoeuvrings, and indeed the high educational standards provided by Catholic schools. An intellectually mature British commentator would grasp that point.

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Irish archbishop in SA warns of country's low-energy 'depression'

Jason Osborne

The precarious state of South Africa's electricity grid, which sees regular "planned and controlled" shut-downs of parts of the grid so as to avoid a national blackout, has led to a "depressed" people an Irish archbishop living there has claimed.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* about the controversial "load shed-

ding" practice, Archbishop Liam Slattery OFM described the situation as "erratic".

"Load shedding is part of our daily life here in South Africa. I'm just an ordinary householder as it were, so you're looking at four, sometimes six hours a day. Now, they do – we have apps, of course – tell you what hours you're off each day, so there is some help there.

"But, I mean, it varies nearly every day. Today now, it was off from 12 last night until about 2 or 3, and it was off this morning from 8 until about 10. In the afternoon now, I would like to do some typing and that, which uses electricity, and maybe from 2 to 4 it may be off, that sort of a thing," Archbishop Slattery said.

The Church having made a num-

ber of statements about it, all the Faithful can do is hope, he said. People are "despondent, people are stressed," Archbishop Slattery said, by the economic burden load shedding is placing them under.

"It will affect it [the Church] in the sense that we're distressed that so many of our people are so vulnerable now, have lost their jobs. I wouldn't be able to give you a per-

centage, but quite a lot of people have lost their jobs and if it continues like this, a lot of other people will lose their jobs too. In that sense that our congregants, people who come to Church and so on regularly, they are being affected negatively and they're under stress because of this."

i See page 18.

Aontú candidate 'shocked' after home daubed with sectarian graffiti



A photograph of the sectarian graffiti at Sharon Loughran's home.

Chai Brady

The home of an Aontú election candidate in Newry was targeted with sectarian graffiti, the party announced on Monday.

In a statement Aontú said loyalists defaced Sharon Loughran's property with the words 'Aontú IRA out' and 'UDA'. The incident has been reported to the PSNI.

Ms Loughran said: "This has come as a massive shock to me. It is an attack on my home and it is a violation. As a result it has created significant stress."

The paediatric A&E nurse in Daisy

Hill Hospital said she decided to run for council to campaign to save key surgery services at the hospital and that she works for everyone in the community.

She added: "That this type of intimidation is happening in 2023 is incredible. That we have a never-ending political vacuum at Stormont is in no doubt not helping the development of good community relationships. Newry is a great town and the vast majority of people no matter what their background is would have no tolerance for this type of sectarian intimidation.

"I will not be intimidated, I will not be moved in my fight for Daisy Hill

Hospital. I genuinely want to work for everyone in in this great town".

On Tuesday evening Aontú launched 19 candidates for the local election in the North of Ireland. Leader of the party Peadar Tóibín said his party's campaign "is for many people about life and death, about the ability to feed your family and keep the heat on".

"This election is about the ability of families to keep their head above water. It's about whether our political future is more of the same or if we can step into a new prosperous Ireland of real democratic accountability," he said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Retired priest who struck mourners with car avoids jail

A retired priest who lost control of his car and struck mourners gathered outside a church – leading to the death of one man and serious injury to three others – has been given a suspended sentence.

Fr Denis Foley (93) lost control of his car outside a funeral at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Clondalkin in 2018.

Judge Martin Nolan said it was a terribly tragic situation and Fr Foley's driving caused "mayhem" and people had to "scamper for safety", *The Irish Independent* reports.

However, he said that Fr Foley did not deserve a custodial sentence. "He will not drive again. Whatever time that is left to him he will probably spend in a nursing home," Judge Nolan said before he imposed concurrent sentences of 18 months which he suspended in full.

St Peter's Basilica introduces new 'prayer entrance'

Amid an influx of tourism that saw around 100,000 people pack into St Peter's Basilica on Easter Sunday, the Vatican has introduced a separate "prayer entrance" for Catholics who want to enter St Peter's Basilica for Mass, Confession or adoration.

The entrance, which is signalled by a small sign, is immediately to the right of the barricades to enter through the metal detectors on the right side of the piazza.

Archpriest of St Peter's Basilica, Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, said the prayer entrance was introduced on an "experimental basis".

"In line with the Holy Father's wish, we would like to restore maximum accessibility to the sanctuary for spiritual, liturgical, and celebratory life," Cardinal Gambetti said.

US-based Irish nun dies aged 95

Sr Assunta Prunty OSF, a professed member of the Sisters of St Francis in Philadelphia for 69 years, died aged 95 on Sunday.

Sr Assunta, born Ellen Frances Prunty in Co. Longford, entered the congregation in 1951 and professed her first vows in 1954.

Having earned a BA in English from Neumann University, she spent the majority of her seven decades ministering in elementary education.

She began her ministry in the archdiocese of Philadelphia, and also served in Spokane diocese and Cheyenne diocese on America's west coast.

Sr Assunta returned to the east serving in both the dioceses of Wilmington and Allentown. Her funeral Mass takes place on April 21 at 4pm Irish time.

TD hits back at HSE 'smears' of pro-life organisations

Ruadhán Jones

TD Michael Collins has hit back at the HSE for having "smeared" pro-life counselling services, after the HSE described them as "disingenuous organisations".

The Health Service Executive described a "disingenu-

ous organisation" as one that offers "advice and supports that do not include information on abortion services".

In response, Deputy Collins criticised the HSE, saying an openly pro-life counselling service "should not be smeared in this way simply because it adheres to a life-affirming ethos which rejects

the claim that abortion is healthcare".

Pro-life counsellors provide women in unplanned pregnancies with positive supports and alternatives, the independent TD continued.

"As is evident from the startlingly high abortion rate of 8,500 last year, the Government is failing to provide

women in unplanned pregnancies with much needed supports and other services," Mr Collins said.

In a statement, the Pro Life Campaign called the definition "highly inappropriate", highlighting the "gross deficiencies" in the HSE's MyOptions.

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No reasonable objection can be made to Joe Biden's Knock visit



The president is clearly not where he should be as a Catholic, but the Pope encourages accompaniment rather than condemnation, writes **David Quinn**

When President Joe Biden was in Ireland last week, there were no reports of him receiving Holy Communion. That meant no bishop or priest here was faced with the potentially very difficult situation of giving the Eucharist to a self-professed Catholic politician who openly supports a very liberal abortion regime.

No objections

No matter what happened, there would have been a firestorm. Many conservative Catholics would have been angry if he was given Communion, and liberals would have been outraged if he had not. But the controversy was avoided because President Biden does not appear to have received Communion while here. He arrived on a Tuesday and left on a Friday and therefore there was no necessity for him to attend Mass when he was in the country.

“Joe Biden is clearly not where he should be as a Catholic. His stance on abortion is appalling and incompatible with his faith”

He did, of course, visit Knock Shrine, and said some private prayers while there. No reasonable objection can

be made to this. While there are arguments about who can and cannot receive Holy Communion, anyone (they do not even have to be Catholic) can come into a church to pray and it would be a very rare priest indeed who would stop someone coming in to pray because of their public position on something.

Joe Biden is clearly not where he should be as a Catholic. His stance on abortion is appalling and incompatible with his faith, but Pope Francis urges priests to practice ‘accompaniment’, that is to journey alongside Catholics rather than condemning them for their sins while at the same time attempting to bring them where they ought to be, spiritually speaking.

Knock

Fr Richard Gibbons is the parish priest of Knock. He welcomed President Biden to the basilica. There is hardly a priest in Ireland who would have done otherwise.

Hopefully there are priests in America who have access to President Biden who can eventually persuade him that his position on abortion is incompatible with his Catholic faith. That is what ‘pastoral accompaniment’ looks like. Befriend him, and then lead him to where he should be. If they are not doing this, then they are failing as true pastors.

After visiting Knock Shrine earlier on Friday, Mr Biden gave an address that night to a crowd gathered outside St Muredach’s cathedral in Ballina, which is in the diocese of Killala. It was the final event of his visit.

The place was chosen because Ballina is one of Mr Biden’s ancestral homes, the cathedral is ideally located in the town, and an ancestor of Biden’s sold some of the bricks used to build the cathedral.

Afterwards, he was shown around the cathedral by Bishop John Fleming.

Photo opportunity

The visit to the Republic was a very low-stress one for Mr Biden. (Obviously the situation when he visited the North was more politically sensitive). Essentially, it was an extended photo opportunity ahead of next year’s presidential election. It may also have been his last chance to visit as president. He is 80 and cannot be certain how much time is left to him. Also, he might be defeated next year.

Clearly this is a visit he



US President Joe Biden and Fr Richard Gibbons, rector of Knock Shrine, touch the original gable wall of the church where the apparition occurred. Photo: OSV News.

was very keen to make. He is very proud of his Irish roots (which come down from his mother’s side, on his father’s they are English), and he is a praying, practising Catholic, notwithstanding some of his public stances.

“Is it because the Church became so dominant here? This is probably a bigger part of the explanation. Its dominance invited a backlash”

In fact, he is only the second Catholic to become president of the United States, and seems to be more devout in his faith, after his own fashion, than John F. Kennedy.

But what I found interesting was his willingness to visit Knock Shrine and pray there. What senior Irish politician today would do that, or use a cathedral as a backdrop for a big public event?

Even if you believe Mr Biden was cynically doing so to win votes at home, clearly, he believed it would do

exactly that.

Here, a senior politician would more likely calculate that making a special visit to Knock Shrine would be a vote loser, whether or not he or she was a practising Catholic. That is the atmosphere in Ireland today.

But clearly it is not the atmosphere among most Irish American Catholics. This is worth pondering. Why are they less anti-Catholic than many of us have now become?

Scandals

Is it because of the scandals? Partly, perhaps, but the Church in America has had child sex abuse scandals which were covered up, and which caused horror, but have not resulted in such levels of anti-Catholicism in the US that a presidential visit to Knock Shrine was impossible.

Is it because the Church became so dominant here? This is probably a bigger part of the explanation. Its dominance invited a backlash.

But it is still very interesting that the memory of the Irish in America is not anti-Catholic. The waves of emigrants who left here from

the Famine and for about a hundred years afterwards, left an Ireland where the Church was re-establishing itself after the final lifting of the Penal Laws. It soon became a very powerful force in Irish life again.

Indeed, it was the Church of Cardinal Paul Cullen, who is often criticised today for establishing such a tightly controlled, Rome-looking, clerical Church.

“But it is still very interesting that the memory of the Irish in America is not anti-Catholic”

But if that Church was so dreadful, then why didn’t the Irish who went to America from the time of the Famine bring a memory of how awful it supposedly was with them? But they brought over no grievance against the Church. They handed down no grievance against the Church. What they brought over instead, and handed down to succeeding generations, was a grievance against Britain.

It was seen as the source of their woes.

The Church was seen as their friend and ally when they had nothing else, the main thing they could rely on aside from their own families and neighbours, the main thing that gave them a sense of pride. And if the morality they grew up in was strict, and sometimes overly harsh, it is probably what they wanted, because it is very hard to climb out of poverty without a strict moral code.

We see this with immigrant groups to this day who pursue success in their new country. They often have strict morals.

We threw off that strict code only when we became more prosperous because we decided we didn’t need it anymore.

What Mr Biden brought here with him was a memory of Ireland as it was, and it is romantic memory, tinged with anti-British feeling, but not anti-Catholicism, and this is worth pondering in a country which today has mostly bad things to say about the Church and is unwilling to give it a fair hearing.

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Welcoming pilgrim President Joe Biden to Knock Marian Shrine



Knock shrine 'open to everyone' the rector tells **Chai Brady**, after controversial Biden visits for private prayer

The worldwide attention Knock Shrine in Co. Mayo received after the visit of US President Joe Biden last week was "incredible", according to the rector Fr Richard Gibbons.

While there was backlash to the visit due to President Biden's promotion of abortion as a 'right', Fr Gibbons said the president was coming for private prayer and that it wasn't a public demonstration.

Welcome

"He wanted to come in privacy for his own prayer. We're not policemen of who comes to the shrine, the shrine is open for anybody to come at any particular point in time and they're always welcomed as a pilgrim," he said.

"He came as a pilgrim, we received him as a pilgrim, and anything else after that is between himself and the Lord, otherwise we'd be policing people at the borders of the shrine and that is not what a shrine is about," Fr Gibbons said, adding, "We don't know the status of anybody that comes to the shrine in terms of their relationship with the Lord and that's the whole point of a shrine, it's a place you should be able to feel you are welcome to come."



Above: President Joe Biden with Fr Richard Gibbons PP on the sanctuary of the basilica. Above left: The stone from Knock apparition gable given to President Biden. Left: *Knock – A Pilgrim Place* book signed by President Joe Biden during his visit to Knock Shrine.



The Beast, the jeep that transports President Biden. Fr Richard Gibbons leads President Joe Biden from the basilica to the Apparition Chapel during his visit to Knock, passing in front of the holy water font.



Fr Frank O'Grady, former US army chaplain at Walter Reed Military Hospital holding medals given to him by President Joe Biden: Photo Monica Morley



President Biden's son Hunter and sister Valerie enter the Apparition Chapel at Knock Shrine.



President Biden and Fr Richard Gibbons walk towards the Apparition chapel at Knock Shrine

President Biden arrived by motorcade on Friday, April 14, and was welcomed into the Basilica of Our Lady, Queen of Ireland by Fr Richard Gibbons and the manager of Knock Shrine John Conroy. President Biden's sister Valerie and son Hunter accompanied him.

Mosaic

Fr Gibbons showed the president the basilica's famous mosaic which contains more than 1.5 million pieces depicting the Virgin Mary appearing before the 15 witnesses in 1879. "I explained a bit about the apparition, he asked questions, then we shared stories. He was in great form and very engaging and wanted to know what was going on and all the rest of it," he said.

The president was then led to the Apparition Chapel, the site where the apparition took place in 1879. Speaking about this part of the visit, Fr Gibbons said: "We proceeded to light a candle for his intentions and that of his family and then we recited a decade of the Rosary together and he was left then in private - his own private prayer."

President Biden also met Fr

Frank O'Grady, a retired priest and chaplain in Knock, who was a US army chaplain at Walter Reed Military Hospital in Maryland where the President's son Beau Biden spent the last weeks of his life.

"We had a nice chat for about ten minutes. He was delighted to see me and I was delighted to see him. He gave me a big hug and Hunter gave me a big hug"

Beau Biden passed away in 2015 and Fr O'Grady gave him the last rites. Speaking to RTÉ after the interaction he said: "He didn't know I worked here. So when... I saw him, he was a bit emotional. The last time we met was when his son was very ill eight years ago and it all came back to him".

"I met in the Apparition Chapel, himself, and his son Hunter and also his sister. We had a nice chat for about 10 minutes. He was delighted to

see me and I was delighted to see him. He gave me a big hug and Hunter gave me a big hug. It was like a reunion," said Fr O'Grady.

"I said to him he was a person of great faith and he said the Faith sustained him in the past, in that difficult time, and still does."

He received two medals as a gift from the president - a presidential medal and the souvenir medal of the president's visit to Ireland.

Regarding the benefits of the visit for the shrine, Fr Gibbons said: "It's incredible

in terms of the attention that it brought to the shrine itself, since Pope Francis elevated it to international status we were wondering what to do after Covid and this is one of the biggest opportunities in terms of getting the shrine's recognition out there... to be that centre where people can come and pray and be at peace so we're very, very happy with that."

Before President Biden departed, Fr Gibbons presented him with a piece of the original stone from the gable wall at Knock Shrine.

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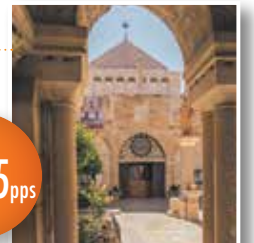
President Biden is greeted by Fr Richard Gibbons rector of Knock Shrine and manager John Conroy during his private visit to Knock. Photos: Sinead Mallee

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AI study shows religion not a driver of NI conflict



An AI study of conflict in the North shows religion is not to blame, writes **Ruadhán Jones**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) may be seen as a threat to humanity, but a new study shows how it can be used to tackle real-life conflicts. Conducted by the Cambridge University's interfaith Woolf Institute, a study of conflict in Northern Ireland has found that religion wasn't the driver and that a desire for fairness not forgiveness or vengeance is inspiring cooperation.

Making use of AI to simulate the responses of people in a complex environment to see how they respond to stressors like violence, the research team downloaded over 50 million news articles and distilled the data so they could see what's driving conflict, and what's driving cooperation.

Conflict

Many still see the Troubles as being a war of religion, with the conflict being stoked by religious disagreements. However, although we use the titles 'Catholic' and 'Protestant', information drawn from the AI modelling shows that identity plays a far bigger role than religion in provoking conflict.

"Both from the data and from the people we've spoken to, the anecdotal evidence, religion was not a big factor in the conflict in Northern Ireland," says head researcher Katherine O'Lone. "It was primarily about identity."

It was almost happenstance that for the two identities, Republican or loyalist/unionist, religion tended to align with "one or the other", she continues. "Religion was not the main driving force in the conflict. It was about identity, it was about protecting a cherished group that you believe you have, that you would fight and die for."

The biggest driver of conflict is actually anxiety around group identity. This anxiety is especially potent when the difference in the size of hostile groups isn't large, a fact made particularly relevant in the North as the 2021 census shows that Catholics now outnumber Protestants 45.7% versus 43.48%.



Catholics pray on March 8 near the Massereene army base after two British soldiers were shot dead and four other people wounded in a March 7, 2009, shooting in Co. Antrim. Photo: CNS/Reuters

"What we see now of course in Northern Ireland, is a very significant shift in the demographic, which is going to impact quite heavily on anxieties around protecting identities in Northern Ireland," says Dr O'Lone.

“If there are those extraordinary religious figures in the community, you can reach out and above their silos and engage with the other side”

According to the researchers, these conditions are "optimal for the escalation of mutual anxiety", and that a shift from majority to minority status for Protestants "will no doubt have a psychological impact".

The misunderstanding of the conflict reflects a bias in the secular west. Religion is often accused of being the main driver of conflict, says Dr O'Lone. "But actually it's a unifying factor for some people," she continues.

"If there are those extraordinary religious figures in the community, you can reach out and above their silos and engage with the other side. You often find that people unify over the idea of religion, that it's a common shared belief in the

divine, for example, in something better after this life, and that's actually a unifying force rather than a divisive one.

"Religion I think is a source for cohesion and a source for good, rather than the commonly held assumption that it's just always a divisive factor. And I don't think that's true," Dr O'Lone finishes.

In the North, the qualitative data gathered by the study highlights "the extraordinary role" that religious leaders played in the brave steps that they took in trying to engage across community divides.

Phenomenon

It's not just limited to Northern Ireland, "it's a global phenomenon when it comes to religion and peace building that it really relies on just an individual to reach across the community divide and try and push both communities toward negotiation or towards peace", Dr O'Lone says.

This conclusion is corroborated by the findings from the two other countries the study examined, South Sudan and Bosnia: "In South Sudan, you also have tribal differences that you need to factor in. The one thing we did find in South Sudan, which has been corroborated if you like by our on the ground subject matter experts, is that dispute over resources were the prime motivators of conflict in South Sudan.

"This ties in quite well with

what we've heard from stakeholders there who say that it's the allocation of resources – for example cattle raiding in South Sudan is often a precursor to conflict. It's quite literally one group taking another group's resources that is the thing that's most likely to spill out into conflict between groups, not so much religion."

“The AI study shows that neither forgiveness nor vengeance are driving the cooperation that has led to the fragile peace of the Good Friday Agreement”

On the whole, she says, "People just lazily assume that religion must be the root cause of it. But our data doesn't suggest that. That its more to do with psychological processes surrounding a group identity."

Meanwhile, the AI study shows that neither forgiveness nor vengeance are driving the cooperation that has led to the fragile peace of the Good Friday Agreement. Instead, fairness – which the researchers' commentary says can be associated with perceptions of justice and injustice – has been

driving peaceful cooperation.

"In the academic literature, perceptions of injustice or unfairness are often a catalyst to conflict," the researchers say. "Our findings suggest that in Northern Ireland, the opposite is happening. There seems to be a desire for fairness – perhaps which we can roughly equate with justice – that is driving and strengthening intergroup relations and moving towards episodes of cooperation."

In their commentary, the researchers say that "Many of those we've spoken to in Northern Ireland, from all sides, have emphasised that although the violence ended, for the most part, after the GFA what was never addressed were issues surrounding justice and legacy".

Discourse

"Now, these two issues dominate the public discourse and currently the much anticipated 'Legacy Bill' sits in the committee stage in the House of Lords. What our findings about fairness suggest is this Bill is hugely significant and timely.

"It could offer a state-sanctioned mechanism to address people's clear concerns about fairness. This is in line with anecdotal evidence we've gathered which suggests that people don't desire revenge or the desire to forgive; they desire a sense of fairness," the research suggests.

Michael D. Higgins praises Pope Francis' solidarity with indigenous



The President of Ireland praised the Pope for repudiating the 'Doctrine of Discovery', writes **Ruadhán Jones**

At the end of March, President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins sent Pope Francis a long letter praising the Pope for his "strong solidarity of indigenous peoples". Francis' call to the Christian community "never to permit itself to be infected by ideas that promote superiority of one culture over another" was appropriate to our own time of "rising xenophobia, prejudice and intolerance", President Higgins wrote.

“It was to this that President Higgins responded, full of praise for the Pope”

The President's March 29 letter came in response to a Vatican decision that passed most of the Irish public by. At the end of March, the Vatican Dicasteries of Culture and Education, and of Promoting Integral Human Development made clear that the 'Doctrine of Discovery' is not and never has been a doctrine of the Church. The statement points out that the 'doctrinal' title was only given to it by the US Supreme Court in the 1800s, a cause of much confusion.

It was to this that President Higgins responded, full of praise for the Pope. The topic is clearly on his mind – according to a press release, he brought the subject up with US President Joe Biden on his visit last week.

But if you have never heard of the so-called 'Doctrine of Discovery', then you are not the odd one out. It relates to interpretations of 15th Century papal documents from the period 1455-1493 – the



Pope Francis kisses the hand of an indigenous leader during a meeting with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities at Maskwacis, Alberta, July 25, 2022. Photo: CNS

period in which the Americas were 'discovered' by Europe.

According to Catholic philosopher Fr Séamus Murphy SJ, from that period up to the 19th Century, these statements were interpreted at different times as supporting the colonisation of the Americas and "giving permission to European Christian monarchs to invade, conquer and forcefully Christianise the native peoples of the Americas".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Murphy, professor of philosophy at Loyola University, Chicago, in the US, says: "It seems clear that the magisterium of the Church (popes and bishops) did indeed fail in the past to repudiate such interpretations of those documents."

Misunderstanding

However, secular newspaper articles on this topic tend to be misleading, misunderstanding how the Church defines doctrines and also glossing over the historical context of the papal documents. The Vatican statement, Fr Murphy says, gives the full picture.

"First, there is no such 'doctrine', since that term applies only to the core teachings of Catholic Faith, to be held by all the Faithful," he tells me. "The documents in question had to do with practical matters involving particular decisions.

"Second, interpreting historical documents always requires setting them in context. Doctrinal definitions are (we hope!) valid through all changes of historical context; but statements on what one may do in a particular context might not apply in a different context."

There were three papal

documents, dated 1452, 1455, and 1493, that gave support for exploration and conquest, he explains. The third one, *Inter Caetera* (1493) by Pope Alexander VI, addressed to the Spanish monarchs, said we "give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs... with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, all islands and mainlands to be 'discovered' of the newly 'discovered' Americas.

“However, Fr Murphy continues, as the recent Vatican document notes, 'in 1537, some 40 years after Alexander VI's bull, Paul III issued a bull with a very different tone'”

"It's embarrassing to read today," Fr Murphy comments. "No doubt Alexander, a Spaniard, owed some favours to the Spanish monarchs. The pope's document was unconcerned about the native inhabitants; its focus was on drawing a line between the areas Portugal could 'discover' and those Spain could 'discover': the point of the document was to establish Spain's rights against those of other European powers."

In 1493, just a year after Columbus 'discovered' the Americas, Europeans knew "virtually nothing about what peoples lived there. Columbus's initial impression appears to have been that the inhabitants were primitive hunter-gatherers, and had no state, no civil society", the

Catholic professor says.

However, Fr Murphy continues, as the recent Vatican document notes, "in 1537, some 40 years after Alexander VI's bull, Paul III issued a bull with a very different tone".

In the intervening time, the Spanish conquistadores had overthrown the Aztec empire in Mexico and the Inca empire in Peru, and also inadvertently brought flu and other western diseases, and both conquests and diseases killed large numbers of native Americans.

With a lot more now known about the Americas, Paul III wrote: "We define and declare that ... the said Indians and all other people who may be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property... nor should they be in any way enslaved".

"Historical interpretation of the popes' position at that time has to take both documents together," says Fr Murphy. "Maybe something like, the popes agreeing with European kings that if they found uninhabited lands they could lay claim to them and rule them, provided they spread the Christian faith among any inhabitants, and did not rob or enslave or otherwise mistreat

the inhabitants."

Despite all the debate today surrounding the impact of the documents, Fr Murphy says the popes of the time "knew the European kings were going to conquer any territory they could, so they couldn't be stopped; as they would (unless naive) also have been aware, their appeals for decent treatment of the inhabitants would be largely ignored".

Catholic Church

In any case, he adds, "for today, the Catholic Church apologises for past statements that in any way violated the rights of native Americans going back to 1492. It wishes also for everybody to be clear that there neither is nor was any 'doctrine' of Catholic faith on the matter.

"Basic Catholic doctrine is that all human beings, regardless of gender, race, religion, or other, are equal in the sight of God, and should be treated with respect and their equality acknowledged," Fr Murphy finishes.

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Out&About

Lighting the Easter fire...



MAYO: The paschal candle is lit outside Knock Basilica during the Easter Vigil, April 8. Photo: Sinéad Mallee.



KILKENNY: The choir of Duiske Abbey, Graignamanagh are pictured following their performance of 'An Easter People' in Duiske Abbey on Spy Wednesday. Photo: Tom Walsh.



BELFAST: The 18 people who were received into the Church in St Peter's Cathedral having completed the diocesan RCIA course are pictured after Easter Vigil Mass, April 8.

IN SHORT

Somalia urgently needs Lenten donations says Trócaire

Trócaire is calling on supporters to return their Lenten donations as soon as possible in order to provide life-saving support for almost eight million people facing starvation in Somalia.

Trócaire's biggest fundraising campaign of the year, which finished on Easter Sunday, April 9, focused on the plight of millions of women, men and children in Somalia where the worst drought in four decades has devastated the country.

Trócaire CEO Caoimhe de Barra said that the money now raised will save lives, not

countries where Trocaire works.

The Lenten Trócaire box can be returned to local parish churches or the Trócaire centre: Trócaire, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. You can also donate by visiting www.trocaire.org or calling 1800 408 408.

Pope appoints nuncio to the UK

Pope Francis has appointed Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendía – who formerly served in the nunciature in Ireland – as Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain.

He was appointed the Apostolic Nuncio to the Court of St James's on 13 April 2023, filling a post vacant since the previous Nuncio to Great Britain, Archbishop

the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches on 21 November 2022.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, welcomed the news, saying: "On behalf of our Bishops' Conference, I assure him not only of our warm welcome but also of our full cooperation when he takes up these new responsibilities."

Co. Down woman receives papal medal

A Co. Down woman has been recognised by Pope Francis for her dedicated service over many years to the Church.

Ann Moore was presented with the

church of St Colmcille's, Holywood.

Mrs Moore (80) is a former sacristan at St Colmcille's and also led the Legion of Mary group in the parish for decades.

Another parishioner, May McCaffrey, was also due to be recognised before she passed away last year.

The Mass was concelebrated by Holywood parish priest Fr Stephen McBrearty, who nominated Mrs Moore, as well her son Fr David Moore, who is parish priest of Pomeroy in Co. Tyrone.

Mrs Moore said it was her pleasure to give any service to the Church but "the greatest privilege of my life has been to be a member of the Legion of Mary here with May".

Fr David Moore told the congregation his family has been "truly touched" and hon-



▲▼ **CLARE:** The Killaloe diocesan Chrism Mass took place on April 3 in the Cathedral of St Peter and Paul, with priests of the dioceses and those in lay ministries renewing their vows.



BELFAST: Ann Moore (80) is pictured after receiving the Benemerenti medal from Pope Francis at a Mass to celebrate her award in her home church St Colmcille's, Holywood. Ms Moore cuts the cake with her son Fr David Moore PP of Pomeroy, daughter Linda and son Stephen. Photo: Bill Smyth.



TIPPERARY: Derg Youth Council are pictured with Fr Rexon and Fr Tim O'Brien at Holy Thursday Taizé prayer in Youghalarra Church on April 7.



DUBLIN: A packed Church St church is pictured on Easter Sunday as the Brazilian community celebrate Christ's resurrection.



MONAGHAN: Fr Tom Quigley and Fr Jerry White SSCC are pictured at the empty tomb display, created by a parishioner, in St Patrick's Church, Bawn.



LOUTH: Matthew Osahenrumwen is pictured with Fr Richard Delahunty CSsR after receiving Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion during the Easter Vigil in Holy Family Parish Dundalk



ANTRIM: The congregation of St John's Parish Falls Road, Belfast, are lit by candles during the Easter Vigil.



DUBLIN: President of the Legion of Mary Ms Mary Murphy displays her certificate from the Pontifical Academy for Mariology, after becoming the first Irish person to be received into the academy. Also pictured is Oblate Fr Dominik Domagala OMI.



DOWN: Ross Andrews is Baptised during the Easter Vigil in Newry. Photo: Dorothy Murtagh.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



DUBLIN: Fr Vasyi Kornitsky, chaplain to the Ukrainian Catholic community in Ireland, blesses the congregation during Palm Sunday Mass – celebrated on Sunday, April 10, according to the Julian calendar – in Our Lady of Consolation Church, Donnycarney.



TIPPERARY: Legionaries from Roscrea and Kinnitty curias are pictured after their Holy Week retreat in Mount St Joseph Abbey, Roscrea.



ANTRIM: Fr Paul Strain blesses the Easter fire at Glenravel and the Braid during the Easter Vigil, April 8.



MAYO: Lucy holds up her candle, lit from the paschal fire in Knock on April 8. Photo: Sinéad Mallee.

ANTRIM

Fr Stephen Langridge will lead a time of discernment for men considering a call to Priesthood at Drumalis Retreat and Conference Centre, Larne, Friday April 21 at 6pm to Sunday 23 at 3pm. Visit Eventbrite.ie for more information.

St Joseph's Young Priests Society to host a holy hour to pray for priestly and religious vocations on Good Shepherd Sunday, April 30, at 4pm in All Saints Church Ballymena. Guest speaker Fr Conor McGrath, vocations director for Down and Conor.

CARLOW

Graigucullen parish's solemn novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help continues on Monday April 26 and will run for a further seven consecutive Monday nights.

CAVAN

Christian meditation takes place every Thursday evening at 7pm in the Conference Room at the back of Cavan Cathedral.

CORK

Monastic vocations weekend hosted by St Benedict's Priory, Cobh, to take place May 6-7. An opportunity to discern alongside the community. Contact 021 4811 354 or cobhtyburn-convent@gmail.com for more information.

DERRY

Youth 2000 Ulster Retreat takes place in Maghera College from April 28-30, for young adults aged 16-35. Visit youth2000.ie for more information.

DONEGAL

Healing service to take place in Rosstownagh Franciscan friary on Sunday, May 7, starting with the rosary at 2.45pm and followed by Mass and healing service at 3pm. Confessions before and after Mass.

DUBLIN

The Carmelite Third Order/Lay Carmel meet on the third Saturday of every month in the Oratory of Whitefriar street church at 3pm. New members welcome.

'Life in the Spirit' seminars take place in the Ignatian

chapel at Gardiner Street Church every Monday from 7-9.30pm until May 15. Next talk April 24, 'Salvation through Jesus Christ' by Fr Kevin O'Rourke SJ.

GALWAY

Eucharistic adoration takes place in Galway cathedral on Monday to Friday from 11.30am-6pm and on Sunday from 1.15-6pm.

A Youth 2000 prayer meeting for young adults aged 18-35 takes place in the church of St Oliver Plunkett in Renmore on Fridays at 8.15pm.

KERRY

A four-week exploration of the Mass titled 'Emmaus journey to the Mass', through the Gospel story of the Road to Emmaus continues Wednesday, April 26 from 7pm to 8.30pm in St John's parish centre, Tralee.

KILDARE

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Pro-prefect for New Evangelisation of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, will give a talk on 'Evangelisation through faith communities' in the Church of Our Lady's Nativity, Leixlip, from 7-9pm on Monday, April 24.

KILKENNY

Conversations with women in the Bible, a day to explore insights from their stories and God's transforming presence in their lives takes place in Pembroke Hotel on Saturday, May 13. Speaker is Sr Therese Fitzgerald SND.

LEITRIM

Life in the Spirit seminars take place on Wednesdays at 8pm in Aras Pádraig, Drumshanbo, running for six more weeks.

LOUTH

A Novena to St Gerard takes place every Wednesday at 9.30am and 7.30pm in St Joseph's Redemptorist Church, Dundalk.

MEATH

Legion of Mary Navan meetings take place Monday and Tuesday at 7pm in the Community Centre (via red door beside Meals-on-Wheels). Tel: 046 902 3474. Junior Legion meets 7pm on Thursday.

MONAGHAN

The Alzheimer Society Monaghan to host a social club

Friday, April 28, from 11am-1pm. Families are asked to join their loved ones who are living with dementia to come along to St Joseph's Pastoral Centre for a morning of fun activities and a cuppa.

OFFALY

A Youth 2000 prayer gathering for young adults aged 18-35 takes place in the Church of the Assumption, Tullamore, from 7-8pm, with tea and chat after.

SLIGO

A Youth 2000 prayer gathering for young adults aged 18-35 takes place in the side chapel of St Anne's Church, Cranmore road on the first Monday of every month at 8pm.

TIPPERARY

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in St Mary's Church, Clonmel parish takes place Tuesday and Friday 10.30am-6pm. The rosary will be prayed at Monday-Friday at 5.45pm, while Divine Mercy takes place every Friday at 3pm.

TYRONE

The Seven Joys of Our Lady fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order meets each second Tuesday of the month in St Brigid's chapel, Brocagh, Clonoe Parish, at 7pm followed by exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from 8-9pm.

WATERFORD

Former chaplain to the queen of England, protestant Bishop and convert to Catholicism Dr Gavin Ashenden will speak at Café Theology on Monday April 24 at 7pm in the Granville Hotel.

WESTMEATH

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar, Monday to Friday from 2-7pm.

WEXFORD

Rosary and devotions continue every Tuesday at 2.30pm at Rocklands shrine to Our Lady of Wexford until the summer.

South Africa's electricity woes leading to a 'depressed' people



Irish archbishop in South Africa Liam Slattery OFM tells of how the 'load shedding' practice is causing economic havoc, hears Jason Osborne

In one way or another, all of us have a newfound awareness of the precariousness of our modern dependence on electricity and the fuels it's generated by. This consciousness is largely as a result of the war in Ukraine and the effect that has had on gas and oil supply to Europe, but also comes from the teething difficulties of attempting to swap whole societies from fossil fuels to renewable energies. Worring headlines earlier this year warned of electricity grid collapse and national blackouts, both of which thankfully never manifested themselves.

“It's a difficult situation to imagine, but one that has become a reality for those in South Africa”

Never manifested themselves in Ireland, anyway – in South Africa, the situation has moved closer to the cliff edge. A practice that was only distantly mooted in western countries has become a daily, disruptive reality there: 'load shedding'. Load shedding is a “planned and controlled” process of switching off parts of a country's electricity grid due to insufficient capacity so as to avoid a national blackout – a worst-case scenario.

South Africa's largest electricity supplier, Eskom, can either increase the supply of electricity or reduce the demand for it in order to keep the grid in check, but has mainly been resorting in recent months to asking large numbers of its customers to voluntarily reduce their demand (the 'load') in order to keep the system stable and avoid having to load shed.

However, Eskom also attempts to



predict the more precarious periods in advance and communicates via the media and an app a fixed period for scheduled load shedding, which can see the switching off of parts of the electricity network in stages.

Reality

It's a difficult situation to imagine, but one that has become a reality for those in South Africa. Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Archbishop Liam Slattery OFM told of the practicalities behind this radical and desperate measure.

“Load shedding is part of our daily life here in South Africa. I'm just an ordinary householder as it were, so you're looking at four, sometimes six hours a day. Now, they do send you – we have apps, of course – and they'll tell you what hours you're off each day, so there is some help there. But, I mean, it varies nearly every day,” he said.

“Today now, it was off from 12 last night until about two or three, and it was off this morning from eight until about 10. In the afternoon now, I would like to do some typing and that, which uses electricity, and maybe from two to four it may be off, that sort of a thing. In fact, we bought a generator here because it's so erratic.”

The reasons for this are many,

Archbishop Slattery said. The main one is a “lack of maintenance” of the electricity grid over a number of years, but he also attributes much of the issue to corruption.

“Certainly, European countries promised us that if you go off coal, they would compensate us, but that hasn't come through in any real sense”

“The reason for this of course has been the lack of maintenance over quite a many number of years, a lack of future planning on behalf of the government. There is seemingly quite a lot of corruption going on, too. South Africa is very enriched with some industries – coal fields, and you know the people who have the tenders to supply coal for the generation of electricity, there's a lot of questions about what has been going on there. There is corruption in it as well,” he said.

A lack of leadership is another aspect of the problem, which has seen the government scrambling to address the issue. In their recent shuffle, Archbishop Slattery said, the



government appointed a minister for electricity alone.

Destabilising

“Is it destabilising the country? Well, look, first of all it's depressing the country because it's hitting everybody...ordinary householders – the majority of people depend upon electricity, we're an urban society largely now or becoming so and so that is something that everybody is aware of.

“It's also due to the fact that they're building two enormous power stations, but these are already six years overdue and are costing billions more than they were supposed to cost and they haven't come on stream yet. These are the reasons for it,” Archbishop Slattery said.

People are “despondent, people are stressed,” Dr Slattery said.

“Everybody is talking about the

load-shedding. It continues. There's no foreseeable moment in which it will end, although I suppose it will end. They're caught also in the universal debate about getting away from carbon emissions, because we are plentifully strong in coal so what do we replace our power stations with?...Certainly, European countries promised us that if you go off coal, they would compensate us, but that hasn't come through in any real sense.”

“It will affect it [the Church] in the sense that we're distressed that so many of our people are so vulnerable now, have lost their jobs”

It's affecting the Church insofar as it affects any other householder, Archbishop Slattery said. Having made a number of statements about it, all the Faithful can do is hope, he said.

“It will affect it [the Church] in the sense that we're distressed that so many of our people are so vulnerable now, have lost their jobs. I wouldn't be able to give you a percentage, but quite a lot of people have lost their jobs and if it continues like this, a lot of other people will lose their jobs too. In that sense our congregants, people who come to Church and so on regularly, they are being affected negatively and they're under stress because of this.”

“Worrying headlines earlier this year warned of electricity grid collapse and national blackouts, both of which thankfully never manifested themselves”

EASTER SUPER

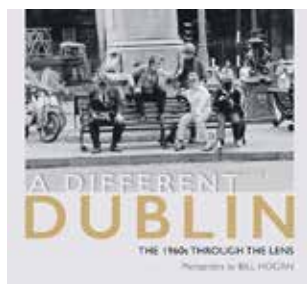
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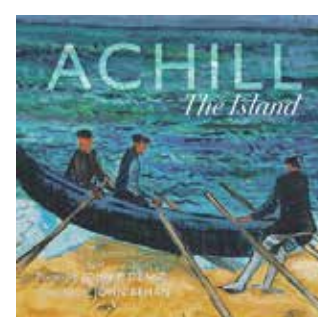
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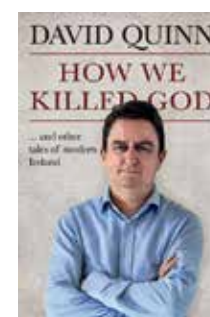
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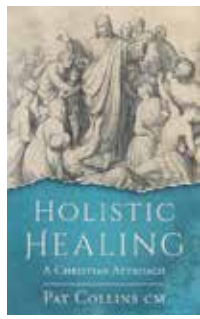
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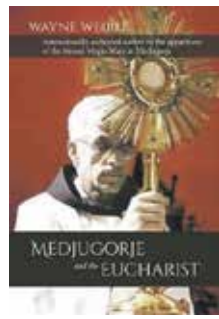
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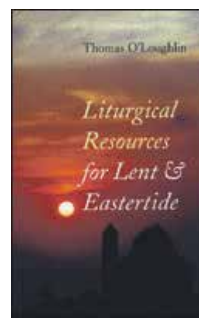
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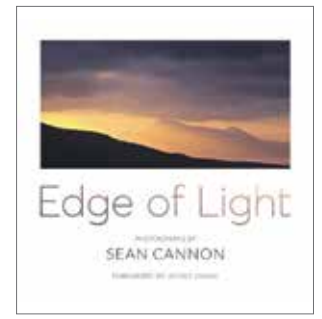
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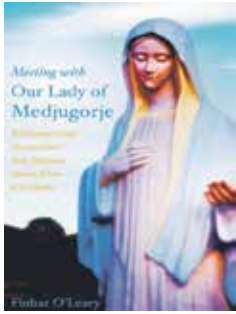
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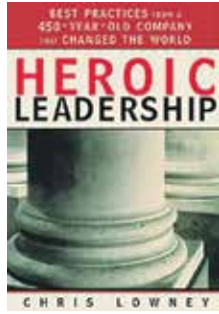
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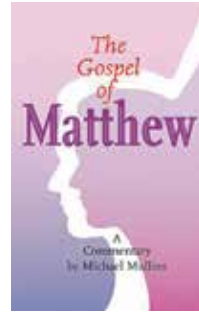
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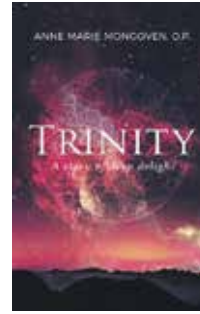
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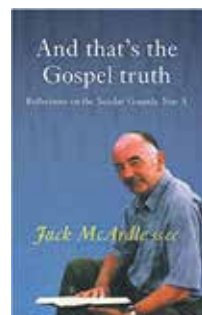
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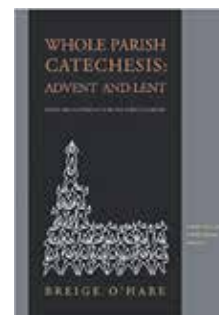
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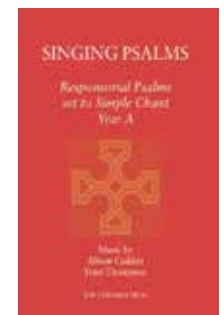
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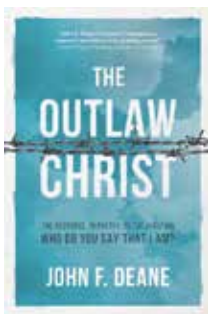
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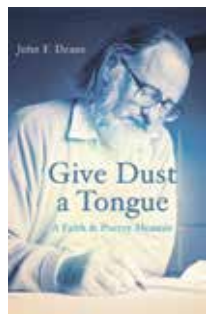
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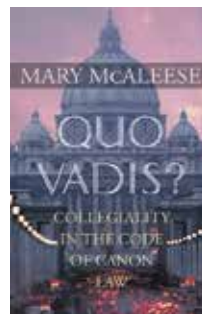
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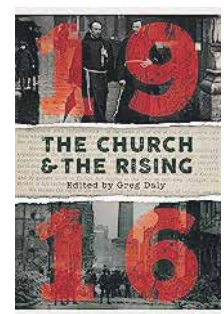
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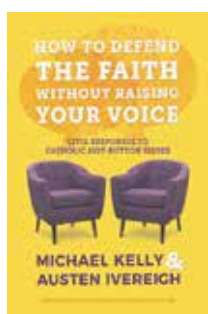
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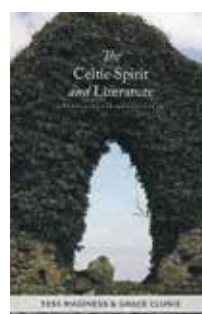
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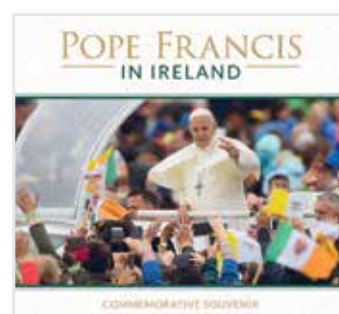
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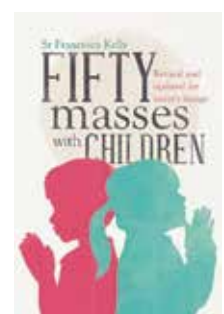
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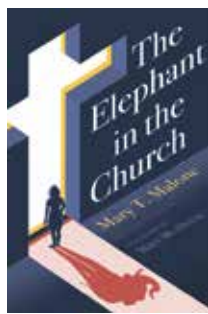
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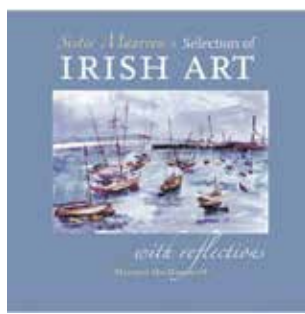
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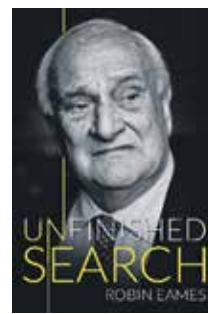
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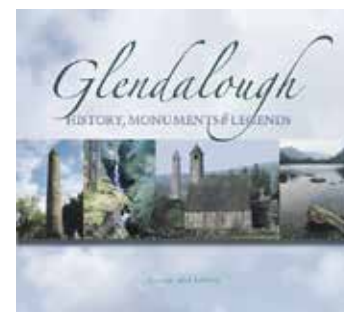
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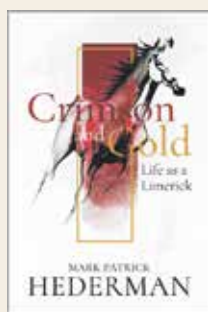
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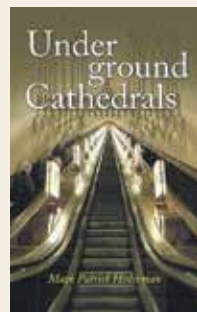
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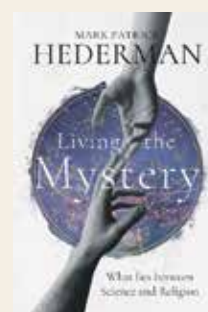
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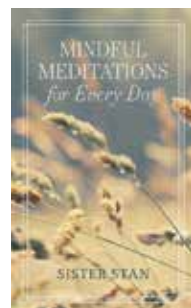


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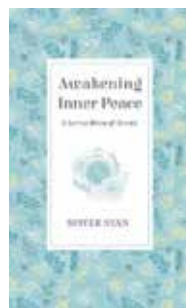
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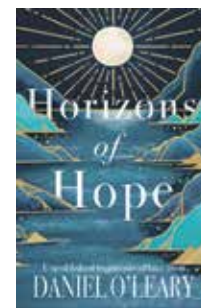
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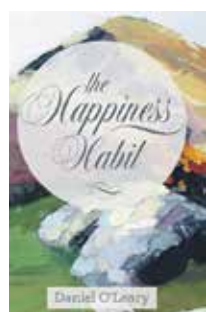


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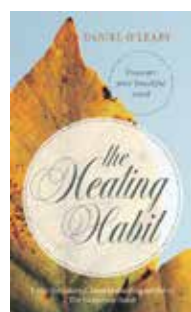
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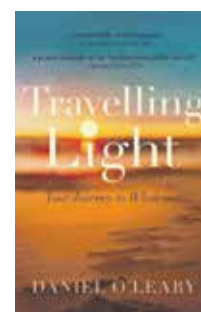


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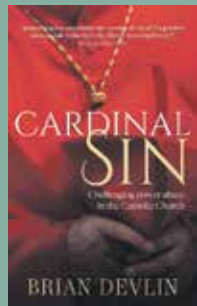


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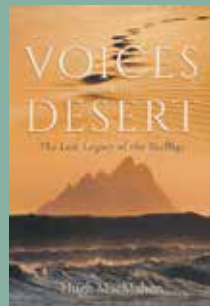


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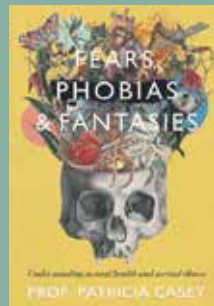
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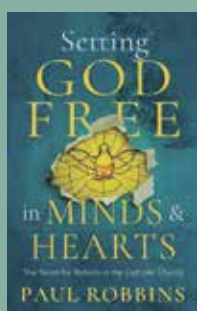
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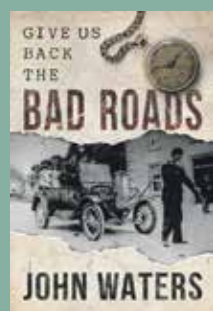
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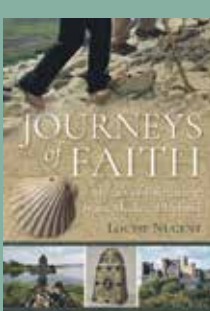
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Women and the question of justice in the Church



A top-heavy structure does not listen to the people, and the people increasingly do not listen to the Church, writes Dr Phyllis Zagano

Twenty centuries of stony sleep? Not really. There are times in the history of the Church when justice was the order of the day, when women were well regarded, and when saying 'Church' indicated all the people of God, not the hierarchical few. That situation began to change during and after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which recommended a return to synodality including all its members. That restoration continues along a bumpy road.

Even though synodality is the buzzword of the day, the fact remains that members of the hierarchy are, or at least consider themselves, insulated from the opinions about Church from those members on the periphery and the people most cut out of the conversation at the highest level are women. Perhaps not the women newly named to positions in the Roman Curia, nor the women chancellors, canon lawyers, or other professionals in diocesan offices, nor even the women theologians, journalists, and activists. However, these all are liable to be excluded.

Marginalised

Joining them are the poor and the marginalised people, the women on the periphery for whom no one speaks and, in too many instances, to whom no one ministers. As they cry out in pain from the wounds of war, the women on the periphery mourn the rape of the land and of their sisters. As those in power meet in draped hotel meeting rooms, heated or air conditioned as the outside temperature dictates, the poor women on the periphery remain either huddled against the cold or perspiring in the heat. As supermarkets fill with nutritious food



Pope Francis greets members of the general assembly of the women's Union of Major Superiors of Italy during an audience at the Vatican on April 13. The Pontiff has said he wants a greater role for women in the Church. Photo: Vatican Media.

stuff and useless snacks, these poor women on the periphery scrape along to find what they can to eat and drink, hoping that the next day will bring some relief from pain, weather, and hunger.

No one needs pounds of synod reports to parse them. The top-heavy structure does not listen to the people, and the people, increasingly, do not listen to the structure.

The periphery, Pope Francis has said, is the centre. But as Yeats pointed out, "the centre cannot hold."

How can the coming implosion of Church and society be addressed? How can one mind contain the competing challenges of the two sides of society's coin – the rich and the poor; the clerics and the 'outsiders'; the politicians and the disenfranchised; the famous and the unknown?

Society has its ills, and the Church attempts to address them.

These ills fall into many categories, some neat, others not so neat; some easy to comprehend, others twisted into labyrinthian knots that challenge all perceptions.

And the Church has its own ills. No one needs pounds of synod reports to parse them. The top-heavy structure does not listen to the people, and the people, increasingly, do not listen to the structure.

Therein lies the crux of the matter. Women are at the bottom yet, strangely, in the centre. Women have been the minsters, silently, efficiently, and professionally keeping that same top-heavy structure afloat.

But the structure seems disconnected from reality and from the Gospel. The question presents itself: How can the Church be just? How can the Church exist justly within both the world and itself? How can the Catholic Church be one that both espouses justice and be just?

Does internal injustice mitigate against any realistic means of speaking to the problems of the world? Discussions about including the laity in decision-making and about the ordination of women hang over any other considerations.

Pope Francis reorganised his Roman Curia following eight years of consultations with his 'C-9' group of cardinals, originally one from each continent, and on March 19, 2022, the ninth anniversary of his inauguration as Pope, published his apostolic constitution, *Praedicate Evangelium*. The apostolic constitution, originally published only in Italian, calls the Church and the Curia to "Preach the Gospel" and is explicit in describing the Curia's organisation and "its service to the Church and the World."

While *Praedicate Evangelium* promises more lay involvement in governance, exegetes are quick to point to positions they believe require clerical orders. Given that 'the laity' is sometimes code for 'women,'

and given the fact that there are distinct levels of discussion relative to the ordination of women (one, as deacons, another as priests), the essential problem remains: How can women be part of the Church in a just manner? How can women be treated justly? Is a 'just Church' possible?

Categories

Essentially, there are two main categories in the discussion of a 'just Church' The two – ecclesiology (theology applied to the Church's organisational structure) and Catholic social teaching – are the framework for analysing the possibilities for 'justice' within the Church.

Together, they can point to a new reality that describes 'Church' as the entire people of God, not simply the hierarchy.

i Dr Phyllis Zagano has lectured throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia. Her awards include the 2014 Isaac Hecker Award for Social Justice from the Paulist Centre Community in Boston. Her work on women in the diaconate led to her appointment in 2016 to the Pontifical Commission for the Study of the Diaconate of Women. This is an extract from her new book *Just Church: Catholic Social Teaching, Synodality and Women* (Paulist Press).

“ Women are at the bottom yet, strangely, in the centre. Women have been the minsters, silently, efficiently, and professionally keeping that same top-heavy structure afloat”

World Report

IN BRIEF

John Paul II's secretary denies pope's role in missing 'Vatican girl'

● St John Paul II's longtime aide denied the "vile insinuations" that the former pope was maliciously involved in the case of Emanuela Orlandi, a Vatican schoolgirl whose 1983 disappearance is the focus of an ongoing Vatican investigation.

Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, who served as St John Paul II's personal secretary from 1966 until the pope's death in 2005, responded to comments made in an interview on Italian television by Emanuela's brother, Pietro Orlandi, April 11.

The cardinal said that Mr Orlandi's claims about the Polish pope's involvement, claims which originated in the "elusive circles of the Roman underworld", are "rambling accusations, false from beginning to end" and even "laughable".

Emanuela Orlandi, the daughter of a Vatican usher who lived inside the walls of Vatican City, disappeared in Rome June 22, 1983. For nearly 40 years, her disappearance has fuelled conspiracy theories.

New horror movie on exorcism is 'story of hope,' says Jesuit producer

● The Jesuit priest who helped produce *The Pope's Exorcist* said horror movie fans will be in for "a fun ride" with the new film that stars Russell Crowe.

Jesuit Fr Edward Siebert, founder and president of Loyola Productions, told *Catholic News Service* that the film "relies upon familiar biblical, literary and cinematic images to personify the lure of evil against the power of good". "Any story that ends

with the enemy's defeat is ultimately a story of hope. And if you are a fan of horror films, this is a fun ride," he said in an email response to questions, April 13.

Fr Siebert, who is also rector of the Jesuit community at Loyola Marymount University and teaches at its School of Film and Television in Los Angeles, served as an executive producer for the film.

Two CRS aid workers killed in Ethiopia on Easter Sunday

● Two Catholic Relief Services (CRS) workers were shot and killed on April 9, Easter Sunday, while riding in a CRS vehicle in the Amhara region of Ethiopia on their way back from an assignment in Addis Ababa.

In an April 10 statement, CRS, the international Catholic humanitarian aid agency that serves those most in need in more than 100 countries, said it was "devastated to report the loss" of two of its staff workers, Chuol Tongyik (37), a security manager, and Amare Kindeya (43), a driver.

"The details of the murder are still unknown," the statement said.

"The depth of our shock and sorrow is difficult to measure, and we are saddened over this senseless violence," said Zemedie Zewdie, a CRS representative in Ethiopia.

More than 20,000 missionaries evangelised the world during Holy Week

● Missionary Youth and Family went on "megamissions" this Holy Week with more than 20,000 missionaries evangelising various places around the world.

The director of Missionary Youth and Family in Mexico and Central America, Brenda Treviño, said that "as part of our 30th anniversary, we have concluded this 2023 megamission with great joy in our hearts. There were more than 12,000 of us missionaries in Mexico and 20,000 in total throughout the world, of 24 nationalities who joined this work of evangelisation".

Missionary Youth and Family is an apostolate of Regnum Christi, an international Catholic movement that is made up of families, laypeople, consecrated persons and priests of the Legionaries of Christ.

Top US military hospital reviews Catholic pastoral care contract after backlash

One of the top military hospitals in the US says it is reviewing a Catholic pastoral care contract it awarded last month to a Virginia-based firm that specialises in providing government clients with industrial machinery, tactical gear, and janitorial supplies, in addition to chaplains and other religious staff.

Franciscan friars at Holy Name College in nearby Silver Spring, Maryland, had provided pastoral services at Bethesda's Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre for nearly two decades. Their contract expired on March 31, Walter Reed said in a statement last Tuesday.

Walter Reed "can and will continue to support all faiths for their religious, spiritual, and emotional needs including those of the Catholic faith," its statement said. "We have an ordained Catholic priest on staff and the awarded contract is to provide coverage in case our staff cannot."

The Holy Name College friary continued to provide services after the contract expired, which prompted an April 4 cease and desist letter from the hospital that only increased Catholic concerns. The Archbishop for Military Services Timothy Broglio voiced objections on April 7, citing the need to provide Holy Week and Easter Sunday services. Archbishop Broglio, who also is president of the



Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre is pictured. Photo: OSV News/Joshua Roberts, Reuters

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, called the hospital's move "incomprehensible".

The new contractor is the Mechanicsville, Virginia-based Mack Global LLC, Walter Reed said in its April 11 statement.

The Mack Global website says the company serves the US military, government agencies and private companies in telework consulting services, administrative and religious staffing, transportation and roadway services, and professional development and training. Its product supplies portfolio includes janitorial supplies, tactical and training equipment,

raw materials, and industrial machinery. It specifically names water-tight doors and gym equipment.

The religious staffing services section of the Mack Global website says the company helps provide staff for "chapel support, religious education coordinators, non-personal chapel support, hospice chaplains, and other religious staff". The "typical religious position" it staffs are those for both Catholic and Protestant musicians, music directors, youth coordinators, and religious education coordinators.

Its staffers are ordained and have the required certifications and clinical pas-

toral education needed for success, according to the website. They are "ordained ministers and experienced leaders as pastors, priests, musicians, teachers, trainers and volunteers who favourably pass the background check application". Company CEO Robin Mack, the website notes, "comes from a strong Christian background and served as a Chaplain at her university".

The Archdiocese for the Military Services did not name Mack Global as the contractor but characterised it as "a secular defence contracting firm that cannot fulfil the statement of work in the contract".

Holy Week attacks on Christians in Nigeria leave nearly 100 dead

At least 94 people reportedly have died in a series of deadly attacks on Christian communities throughout Holy Week in Benue state in north-central Nigeria, an ominous sign of escalating violence blamed on Muslim militias in the country's Middle Belt region.

On April 2, armed men reportedly stormed a Palm Sunday service at a Pentecostal church in Akenawe-Tswarev in Logo county, Benue state, killing a young boy and kidnapping the pastor and other worshippers.

Three days later, on April 5, gunmen

killed at least 50 people in the village of Umogidi, located in Utokpo county, a Catholic stronghold in western Benue, the Associated Press reported.

More recently, on the night of Good Friday, dozens were killed when Muslim gunmen raided an elementary school building in the village of Ngban that serves as a shelter for about 100 displaced Christian farmers and their families.

The April 7 attack left 43 people dead and more than 40 injured, according to Fr Remigius Ihyula, who heads the Benue

branch of the Justice, Development, and Peace Commission (JDPC), a Nigerian Catholic relief organisation.

Hours before the attack, Benue's outgoing governor, Samuel Ortom, speaking in Otukpo, warned residents to remain vigilant and criticised what he sees as a slow response on the part of police and army units to respond to his requests for help.

Mr Ortom had demanded for four years that federal laws be changed to allow citizens to buy firearms for self-defence, without success.

Nuremberg prosecutor Benjamin Ferencz dies at age 103

The last surviving prosecutor of the Nuremberg Trials, Benjamin Ferencz, died on Good Friday at the age of 103. Mr Ferencz secured the convictions of 22 Nazis for the murder of 1 million Jews during World War II. He spent the rest of his life advocating for human rights.

At the age of 27, Mr Ferencz was assigned to prosecute the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) trial, in which 22 former commanders were charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity. He relied on the Nazi's military records to prove that Nazi death squads had targeted

and gunned down thousands of Jewish people, along with other "undesirables," at a time while occupying areas of Eastern Europe.

Mr Ferencz made his final public appearance at an event in late March at the Catholic University of America. During a brief appearance on Zoom,

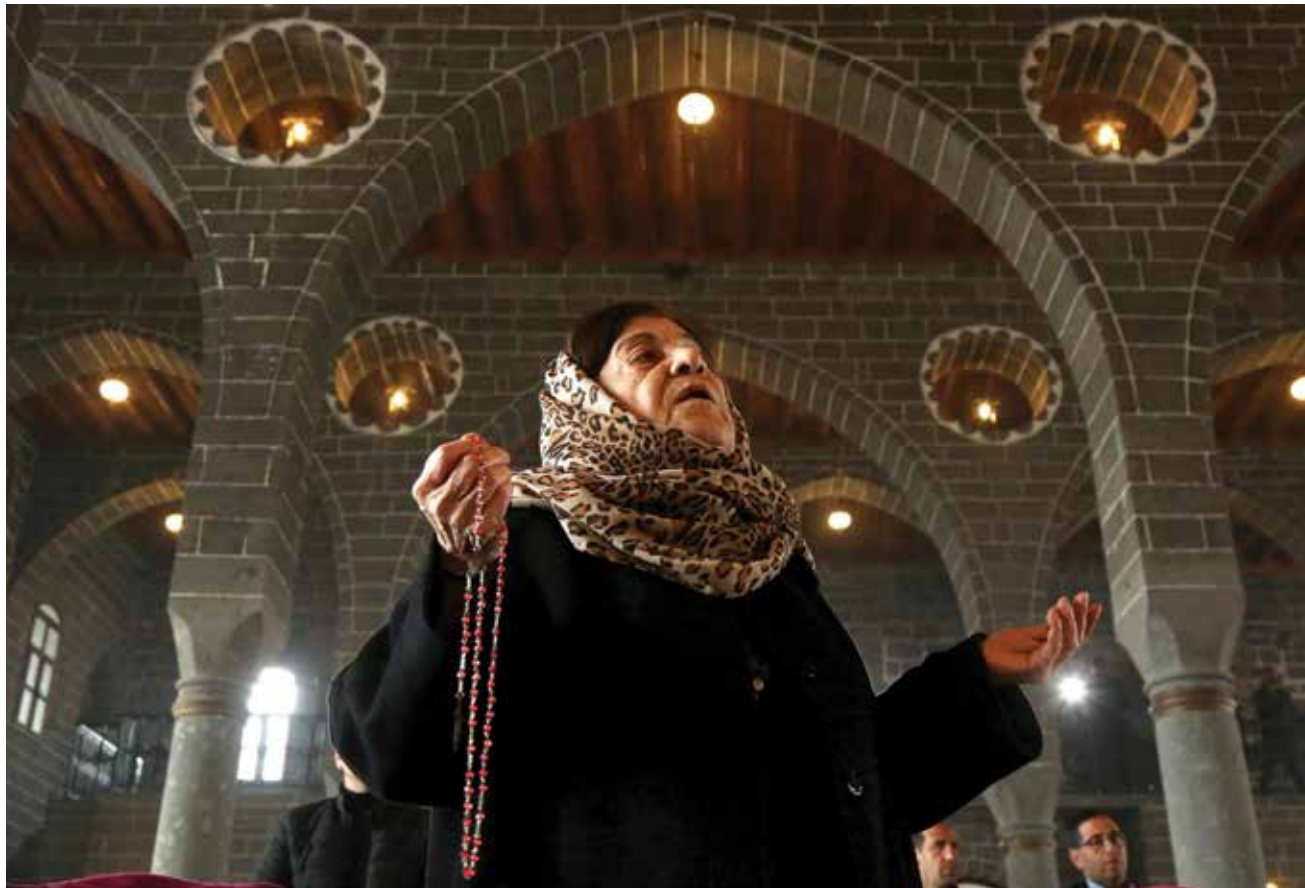
Mr Ferencz spoke about the importance of ensuring human rights for all people, no matter the circumstances.

"We are looking for human rights, meaning all human rights. No one is to be treated as subhuman, or unworthy of being saved," Mr Ferencz said during the conference.



Edited by Jason Osborne
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He is risen, alleluia!



A woman prays during an Easter Sunday Mass at Surp Giragos Armenian Catholic Church in Diyarbakir, Turkey.
Photo: OSV/Sertac Kayar, Reuters

Nicaragua confiscates monastery and arrests 20 people during Holy Week

The dictatorship of President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, has confiscated a cloistered monastery and arrested 20 people for activities related to Holy Week in Nicaragua.

The Trappist sisters of Nicaragua, who left the country in February after 22 years of service, reported April 11 that the government verbally informed the bishop of Juigalpa that the monastery would be taken over by the regime.

The nuns said in a February 27 Facebook post that they voluntarily left the country because of “a lack of vocations, and the old age of several sisters”.

Although they didn't mention anything about their residency status in Nicaragua, the General Directorate for Migration and Foreigners had issued summonses to various religious and foreign missionaries.

According to the Nicaraguan media outlet 100% Noticias, new requirements are being demanded for such religious to remain in the country.

The sisters explained April 11 on their Facebook page that “we had left the monastery under the administration of the diocese while the voluntary closure of the association was being processed with MIGOB [Ministry of the Interior]”.

“On March 1, the document for voluntary closure was presented to MIGOB, and on March 3 the government authorities showed up to verbally inform our bishop that they could no longer go to the monastery and that INTA [Nicaraguan Institute of Agricultural Technology] would work there,” the nuns explained.

Consequently, the monastery, which is located in the town of San Pedro de Lóvago in the Diocese of Juigalpa, will now house INTA.

The nuns, who now live in Panama, where they have been “welcomed with great affection and generosity” after their departure from Nicaragua, also asked for

financial help to be able to support themselves.

Félix Maradiaga, a former political prisoner and president and founder of the Foundation for the Freedom of Nicaragua, shared with ACI Prensa, a message that he addressed on April 11 to a group of committed laypeople from different parts of the world.

The former presidential candidate, who was running against Ortega when the regime had him arrested, said that 20 people were arrested in connection with “processions or public activities of the Catholic Church” during Holy Week.

Largest statue of Christ in Mexico dedicated on Easter Sunday

On Resurrection Sunday, April 9, the Christ of Peace statue was dedicated in Tabasco county in Zacatecas state, Mexico.

The monumental sculpture which sits atop a pedestal measures 33 metres high, which makes it the largest of its kind in the country.

The statue stands in the centre of the esplanade atop ‘Faith and Religion Hill’.

Present at the dedication were the governor of Zacatecas state, David

Monreal Ávila; the president of Tabasco county, Gil Martínez; and the pastor of the Church of the Immaculate Conception in the town of Tabasco, Fr Luis Manuel Luévano Díaz.

According to the Christ of Peace Facebook page, the priest blessed the sculpture and gave a message of faith and hope to the thousands of Faithful present.

In an interview with *Reporte Índigo*, Miguel Romo, the artist who created

the statue, said it took more than two years to be completed.

“If you look, the face is very nicely done. The Christ the Redeemer statue in Brazil is very beautiful, but it's a bit geometrical, with its hands, face, and everything. Not me. I tend to be very realistic, and it's very difficult at this scale; small scale is very easy, but on this scale it's very difficult,” the artist explained.



Date and theme announced for 2023 World Day for Grandparents and Elderly

● The Vatican announced the date and theme for the third annual World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

The event will take place this year on July 23, the Sunday before the feast of Ss Anne and Joachim, the grandparents of Jesus, and the theme for the day, selected by the Pope, will be “His mercy is from age to age” (Lk 1:50).

According to the Vatican Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life, the theme is linked to the theme for World Youth Day 2023, which also comes from the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke: “Mary arose and went with haste” (Lk 1:39).

Pope Francis will preside over a Mass in St Peter's Basilica to mark the grandparents' day and has invited parishes, dioceses, associations, and communities around the world to celebrate the day “in their own pastoral context”.

The Pope, who is 86 years old, has been an advocate for the dignity of the aging and has often emphasised the important role of grandparents in passing on the Catholic Faith. He established the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly in 2021. Last year's theme came from Psalm 92:15: “In old age they will still bear fruit.”

Pope changes law regulating Vatican City court system

● Pope Francis revised a law regulating the Vatican's judicial system on Wednesday, reversing some aspects of the Pope's prior reform of the Vatican City courts.

The April 12 *motu proprio* eliminates the previous mandate for a full-time Vatican magistrate, allowing all members of the court to be able to take on other positions.

It also stipulates that the president of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, the Curia's highest canonical appeals court, will no longer be the de facto president of the Vatican court of cassation.

The new changes mark the third *motu proprio* Pope Francis has issued to amend the law of his 2020 reform of the Vatican City court system.

In his introduction to the document, Pope Francis wrote that “needs have emerged over the last few years in the sector of the administration of justice that require further adjustments to the penal legislation and the judicial system of the Vatican City State”.

The Pope said that the changes take into account the “growing workload for the judicial bodies” and aim to simplify procedures.

Committee begins writing Synod on Synodality working document

● A committee of 22 people kicked off the writing process for the Synod on Synodality's working document that will be the blueprint for discussions during the meeting of bishops in October.

According to a statement from the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops on April 12, a “group of experts from five continents” is meeting at the Vatican until April 19 “with the aim of starting the reflection that will lead at a later stage to the drafting of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the working document for the first session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops”.

The *Instrumentum Laboris*, Latin for ‘working document’, frames the discussions of the Synod of Bishops. During a synod, bishops make comments and observations on the working document and meet in small discussion groups to propose changes to the text or to suggest new texts and additional areas for consideration.

To begin drafting the working document, the group of experts will meet behind closed doors to discuss the continental stage of the Synod on Synodality as a whole and analyse the seven final documents submitted by each of the regional assemblies. The committee's analysis will “highlight tensions and priorities to be studied in depth during the October assembly”.



Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

Waiting for the Catholic Lula to arouse the 'Perennials'

With Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva back in power in Brazil, the acronym 'BRICS' is once again in fashion in international affairs. It refers to Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, with Lula's vision being that these emerging economic and political superpowers could form a partnership to offset the predominance of the West.

This week Lula was in Shanghai to attend the inauguration of former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff as head of the New Development Bank, a Shanghai-based multilateral institution launched by the BRIC nations. Over time, some analysts believe the bank could pioneer a new global economic order, one not dominated by dollar-denominated transactions.

"Every night I ask myself why all countries have to base their trade on the dollar," Mr Lula said during an impassioned speech in Shanghai, calling on the BRICS nations to develop an alternative currency.

Others believe the future of the BRICS initiative is less economic than political, with the alliance potentially becoming the de facto G7 of the global south. Mr Lula's state visit to China this week, including a warm encounter with President Xi Jinping, may have been a step in that direction, even if the Chinese seemed to want to focus more on trade than statecraft.

The resurgence of the BRICS agenda beckons the question of what a similar effort to promote multilateralism in the Catholic Church might look like – in part, to counteract the disproportionate influence of Western Europe and North America on Catholic affairs – and which nations best qualify as the emerging superpowers to lead it.

Right moment

Certainly the era of Pope Francis, history's first pontiff from the developing world, feels like the right moment for such a movement to get underway.

The five BRICS nations include two Asian powers, one African, one Latin American, and one Eastern European state, all of them with substantial populations and all with some reputation for momentum in global affairs. One way of identifying Catholic counterparts would be to look at population totals, to identify the most sizeable Catholic countries, coupled with data on levels of faith and practice, in order to establish dynamism.

By that measure, perhaps the best candidates to form the Catholic version of the BRICS nations would be the following.



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva Photo: OSV News/Agustin Marcarian, Reuters

Germany's controversial 'Synodal Path' has raised hackles in some sectors of Catholic opinion for its endorsement of blessing same-sex relationships"

- The Philippines: 80 million Catholics total, 47 million of whom attend Mass on weekly basis based on data from the World Values Survey.
- Democratic Republic of Congo: 51 million Catholics, 37.5 million weekly Mass-goers.
- Colombia: 35 million Catholics, 20.5 million weekly Mass-goers.
- Nigeria: 32.5 million Catholics, 30.5 million weekly Mass-goers.
- Poland: 33 million Catholics, 17.2 million weekly Mass-goers.

All told, these five nations represent a pool of 231.5 million Catholics, roughly 17% of the global Catholic total of 1.4 billion, but a much higher percentage of Catholics who attend Mass on a regular basis.

Perennial nations

Alas, the initials involved don't really lend themselves to a catchy acronym like "BRICS" ... I mean, "PDCNP" doesn't just come tripping off the tongue. However, I did discover that it's an abbreviation sometimes used in business calculations to represent the output of perennial crops, so I'm dubbing these countries the "Perennials."

As opposed to the BRICS nations, the Perennials contain just one Asian nation but two African countries, which is appropriate given that

Africa has been the zone of Catholicism's most dramatic growth over the past century. Otherwise, it parallels the BRICS nations in featuring one Latin American and one Eastern European nation too.

All five Perennial nations feature local churches with a reputation for social activism and a high cultural profile.

In Colombia, for instance, the Church draws respect for its efforts to end the country's long-running civil war; the Philippines is such a pervasively Catholic society that shopping malls actually have well-attended chapels; Nigeria features arguably the most intensely spiritual cultural climate in the world, with a Catholic Mass attendance estimated at a mind-boggling 94 percent; and in Poland, Catholic identity is still inextricably linked to the legacy of St John Paul II, recently termed by a resolution in the country's parliament as "the greatest Pole in history".

What would a Perennial agenda for Catholicism look like? As with the BRICS countries, to some extent it's a question of whose influence you're trying to offset.

In Catholicism the effort might begin with Germany, given widespread impressions across the global south that German Catholicism

wields disproportionate influence in the Church relative to its numbers and declining spiritual vitality. (Its weekly Mass attendance rate, for instance, is estimated at 14 percent.)

Germany's controversial 'Synodal Path' has raised hackles in some sectors of Catholic opinion for its endorsement of blessing same-sex relationships and other departures from orthodoxy, positions which would not be widely shared in the Perennial nations. Moreover, there's also a perception that the German Church exercises strong influence on Churches in developing nations through largesse dispensed by foundations such as Misereor and Adveniat, using resources collected thanks to the country's Church tax system.

More broadly, the core Perennial aim might be to encourage Catholicism in the developing world to stand on its own two feet, with its own resources and its own voices.

Global inequities

Another issue for the Perennials might be addressing global inequities in the distribution of clergy. Two-thirds of the Catholic people today are in the global south, but more than two-thirds of all priests are in the north, in part because dioceses in Europe and North America are becoming increasingly dependent upon imported clergy. As a result, priest shortages generally are far more acute in the developing world.

In reality, the issue isn't whether there's a potential to-do list for such a coalition. The question is who's the

Perennial Lula, meaning a Church leader with the vision to launch and sustain such an initiative. It can't really be Francis himself, since he's already the leader of the whole Church, not just a geographically and culturally defined segment of it, though he can certainly inspire and support such a development.

While the answer isn't intuitively obvious, that's not for a lack of possibilities.

Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama in Abuja, Nigeria is a charismatic and energetic leader, with plenty of friends in the English-speaking hierarchy around the world. In Colombia, Archbishop Luis José Rueda Aparicio of Bogotá enjoys respect for his efforts to mediate the country's armed conflicts. Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Calococan in the Philippines, currently president of the country's bishops' conference, is admired for his outspoken criticism of former President Rodrigo Duterte's violent war on illegal drugs, and in the DRC, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo is considered a moral critic of abuses of power, having gotten his start at the age of 24 by opposing the Mobutu regime.

Any one of those figures, and others one might imagine, could galvanise a Perennials coalition in Catholicism. Whether one of them steps up and seizes the moment, however, remains to be seen.

Analysts: Russia's persecution of faith in Ukraine part of 'cultural genocide' campaign



Gina Christian

A new report concludes that Russia is systematically persecuting believers of several faiths in Ukraine as part of a campaign of "cultural genocide".

"We see that Russia is now exporting (its) policies of state repression with laws in occupied Ukraine, which the Russian government considers to be Russia," George Barros, geospatial intelligence team lead and Russia analyst at the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), told *OSV News*.

Mr Barros and his fellow analysts at ISW, a nonpartisan, nonprofit public policy research organisation based in Washington, released an April 9 assessment of religious repression in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine since February 24, 2022, when the Russian Federation launched its full-scale invasion of that nation.

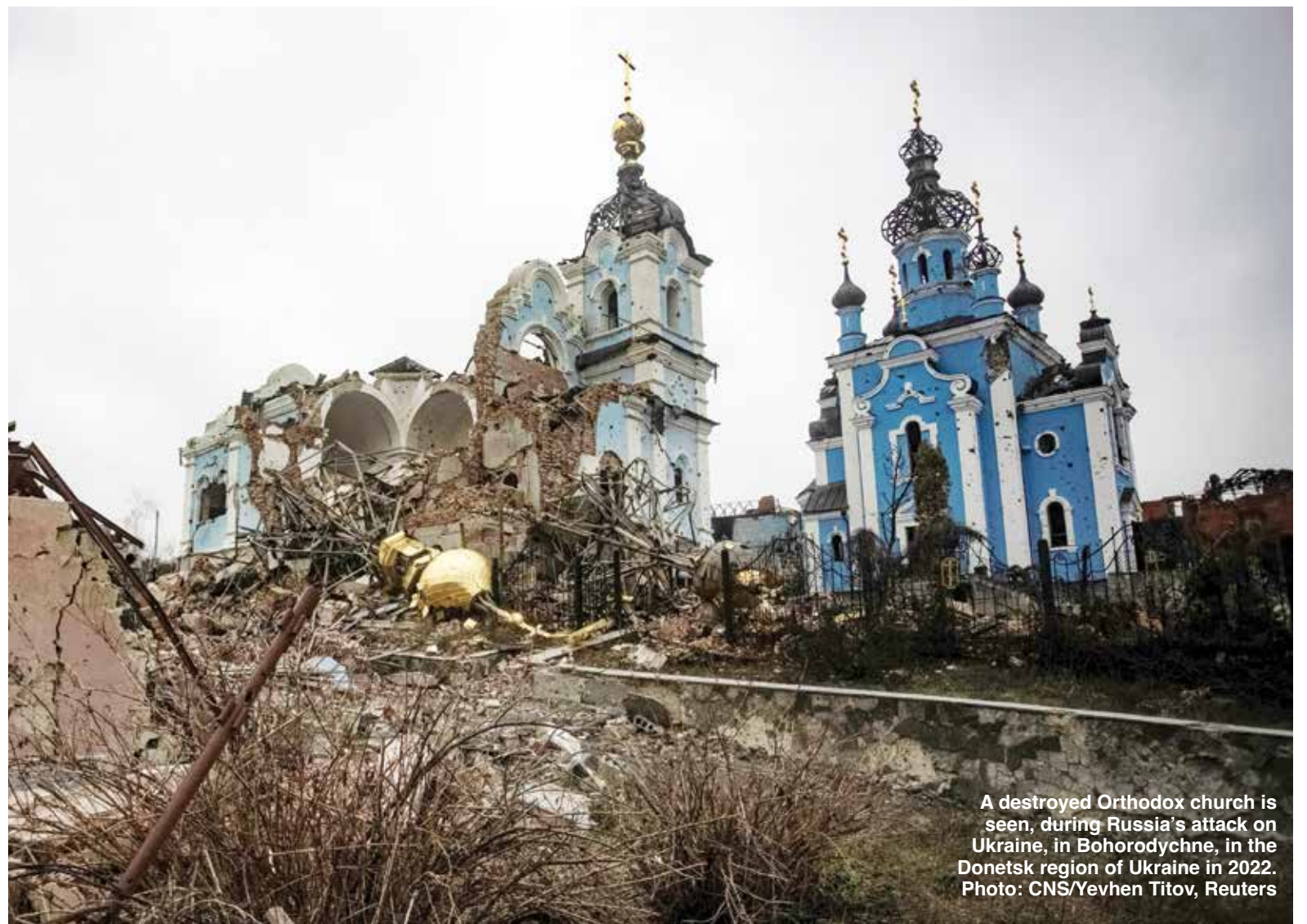
“With some 66,000 war crimes reported since February 2022, Ukraine has filed charges of genocide by Russia with the International Court of Justice”

The invasion continues aggression begun by Russia in 2014 with the attempted annexation of Crimea and the backing of separatists in Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Genocide

With some 66,000 war crimes reported since February 2022, Ukraine has filed charges of genocide by Russia with the International Court of Justice. More than 19,300 Ukrainian children have been abducted by Russia over the past year, according to Ukraine's government. On March 17, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Russian president Vladimir Putin and his commissioner for children's rights, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, charging the two with the war crimes of "unlawful deportation" and with the "unlawful transfer" of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation. ISW has closely monitored Russian aggression against Ukraine for several years, and said in its April 9 update that Russia is also "committing gross violations of religious freedom".

Affected religious groups include the Orthodox Church of



A destroyed Orthodox church is seen, during Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Bohorodychne, in the Donetsk region of Ukraine in 2022. Photo: CNS/Yevhen Titov, Reuters

Ukraine (OCU), and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic and Latin Catholic Churches, as well as Baptist, Lutheran, Evangelical Protestant, Mennonite, Pentecostal and other Christian communities. Islamic and Jehovah's Witness congregations also have been targeted.

Capture of clergy

Among the violations are the capture and killing of clergy; looting, vandalism and destruction of houses of worship; raids, searches and detention of congregants. Several places of worship have been closed or nationalised, particularly those of the OCU, created in 2018 after breaking with the Russian Orthodox Church, which is closely aligned with the Kremlin.

“Among the violations are the capture and killing of clergy; looting, vandalism and destruction of houses of worship; raids, searches and detention of congregants”

Moscow Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church and a staunch ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, has blessed his country's invasion of Ukraine, assuring

his followers that "sacrifice in the course of carrying out your military duty washes away all sins".

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople formally recognised the OCU as an autocephalous (self-governing) Orthodox church in 2019. Between 65% to 80% of Ukrainians self-identify as Orthodox Christians.

In ISW's report, Mr Barros and his colleagues calculated that since February 24, 2022, "Russian authorities have closed, nationalised, or forcefully converted at least 26 places of worship to the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, killed or seized at least 29 clergy or religious leaders, and looted, desecrated, or deliberately destroyed at least 13 places of worship in occupied Ukraine."

Repression

The ISW report said such cases of religious repression, which represent "only a small subset of all reported Russian religious persecution events" in Ukraine, are "not likely isolated incidents but rather part of a deliberate campaign to systematically eradicate 'undesirable' religious organisations in Ukraine and promote the Moscow Patriarchate".

ISW warned that Russia also "continues to weaponise religion ... to discredit Ukraine in the international arena," while "using information operations about religion to

advance military objectives".

The Kremlin seeks to recast the Ukrainian government's efforts to prevent Moscow-friendly Orthodox clergy from compromising Ukrainian defences, said Mr Barros.

“Russia's marketing of itself as a pious guardian of civilisation, which has appealed to some Western conservatives, is dubious, said Mr Barros”

"The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate is not independent. It is an extension of the Russian state," said Mr Barros. "Ukraine's government is taking measures to undermine the influence of the 'fifth column' that is the Russian Orthodox Church. But to some it looks like (Ukrainian President Volodymyr) Zelensky is shutting the church, which is a distortion of the reality."

Russia's marketing of itself as a pious guardian of civilisation, which has appealed to some Western conservatives, is dubious, said Mr Barros.

"The Kremlin tries to put forward a narrative that Russia is this bastion of traditional values and conservatism, and the protector of Christianity in a secularised world,"

he said. "But if we look objectively at Russia, it's actually the opposite."

Abortion and divorce rates are high, while church attendance is "very low" and "perfunctory," said Mr Barros.

Statistics

According to the Guttmacher Institute, 46% of all unintended pregnancies in Russia between 2015-2019 ended in abortion. Divorce reached a seven-year high in Russia during 2021, reported *The Moscow Times*. Attendance at Orthodox churches in Russia is about 1%, according to statistics cited by Massimo Introvigne, founder and managing director of the Centre for Studies on New Religions.

Russia's HIV epidemic – affecting some 1.1 million, and "primarily driven by intravenous drug use" – has been "silenced," said researcher Ulla Pape in a January 2022 article published by the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*.

Such statistics, along with the ISW's report on Russian religious persecution, helps to "put the puzzle pieces together," said Mr Barros. "Deporting (Ukrainian) children, Russifying territories, organised repression and persecution of Ukrainian religious elements – this really is one (overall) effort to destroy the idea of a distinct Ukrainian people," he said.

📌 Gina Christian is a national reporter for OSV News.

Letters

Letter of the week

Spreading positives of Mass through modern means

Dear Editor, Mary Kenny was spot on when she suggested parishes use modern means of advertising to highlight the benefits of going to Mass, this would be a great way to reach out to those who have not returned [*The Irish Catholic* – March 30, 2023]. I don't think fliers will be enough!

Why not buy some advertising on popular local websites? Social

media of course is another great means of reaching those who have not returned, whether that be Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or TikTok if you are very trendy. Even local radio could be useful.

As Ms Kenny outlines, going to Mass has very many physical and mental health benefits. Socialising helps mental health and even just getting out to the church is good for the body.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian spirituality of course, and this is the reason for Mass, but there is no harm pointing out the aforementioned positives to those who are still feeling unsure – perhaps this will be the push that they need?

After all, if it works, it works.

*Yours etc.,
Aoife Whelan
Bray, Co. Wicklow*

Vulnerable children still in danger now

Dear Editor, The Church's crimes of the past regarding the abuse of minors are well documented and rightly publicly decried. Nowadays there are many abuses that continue against children that are either State sanctioned or occur due to State failure. And in State care, as your paper reported, 200 children have died – 38 by suicide – in the past 10 years [*The Irish Catholic* – April 26, 2023].

It is clear that Ireland should not rest on its laurels regarding vulnerable children, particularly as the country has almost 200,000 children living below the poverty line and more than 3,400 are homeless.

And finally, abortion, which has become the norm when a child is unwanted. It has taken the lives of 20,000 children since the law was changed three years ago. Where is the compassion in all of that?

*Yours etc.,
Damien Nolan
Dún Laoghaire, Dublin*



Church will outlast Ireland's current cultural trajectory

Dear Editor, Bishop Dempsey of Achonry's message regarding the synodal process and the need not to water down Church teaching [*The Irish Catholic* – April 6, 2023] is something that should have been said time and again well before the synod began. Vocal critics of the Church and its teaching who desire some fundamental changes in doctrine used the synod

as a battering ram for their own agendas.

I am sceptical of the benefits of the synodal process, it seems to be causing some division, and a lot of confusion, while left-wing media savvy people make it about their pet peeves with Church teaching. Arguments such as the Church needs to 'catch up with the times', that young people do not find the Faith relevant to them or the

Church is being left behind with modern progress, are not seeing the bigger picture.

If the Church were to continuously pander to the culture of the time, it would certainly become irrelevant. Any institution that does not have the strength to stand up for what it believes when it's unpopular, stands for nothing, this is doubly true for a Church in the business of

saving souls.

After more than 2,000 years, I think the future of the Church and its teachings will outlast Ireland's current cultural trajectory.

So, no, women cannot become priests and priests must remain celibate, that is the Church's teaching.

*Yours etc.,
Beth Quinn
Waterford City, Waterford*

Synodal must be understood as not changing doctrine

Dear Editor, Synodal process is still a vague idea. In declaring that the German version is not the real thing, the Vatican merely indicated what synodality is not. Is synodal practice going to be a discipline imposed on both laity and clergy or on just one of them? Or is it going to be an exhortation with acquiescence sustained by respect for the papacy.

For this reason there was no onus heretofore on clergy to promote the synodal process, especially when some of its strongest Irish proponents were linking it to "necessary doctrinal change".

Clergy have to preach religious practice and in the current circumstances should be open to lay involvement in

appropriate pastoral work. But promoting a different religion – No! A different religion is created by changing doctrine and adopting concepts of diversity, inclusion and equality honed not by sacred scripture but imported from secular political practice.

The low response rate to the invitation to express views at the listening phase still provided ample indication of the state of Irish Catholicism. It's easy to miss the point, but the low response rate was the major finding of this consultation with the laity. The other findings were largely predictable.

The Pope could integrate the analogy of the field hospital with St John Henry

Newman's concept of consultation with the laity. The physician listens to the patients, identifies the faith deficits, consults the analogical medical knowledge, proposes remedies, invites the patients to adapt to the benefits thereof, with accompaniment thereafter. Such response facilitates a reordering of life consistent with a coherently lived consent to the terms of the covenant sealed in Christ's blood. The Pope will hardly change the doctrines of matrimony and holy orders.

*Yours etc.,
Neil Bray
Cappamore, Co. Limerick*

facebook community

Each week we publish a selection of comments from *The Irish Catholic* Facebook page

Church can't 'water down' teaching – Bishop Dempsey

Don't water it down because the people that want it changed will want something else if they get that, the word of God stays the same. – **Eilish Higgins**
Well isn't it about time that the bishops preached the teachings of the Catholic Church on all of these issues! – **Carmel Hogan**

What do you think? Join in the conversation on *The Irish Catholic* Facebook page

Obvious policy to push women into abortion

Dear Editor, The pro-life movement in Ireland has often been accused of not caring about children after they are born. Of course this is not true and there are many pro-life organisations who do exactly that, and help women in crisis pregnancies keep their children. Fun- nily enough, they are much maligned by the people who shout about offering women choices.

The majority of TDs in the Dáil voted to repeal the 8th Amendment of the Constitution removing protections from the unborn. Many of the same

TDs voted against legislation that would impose an eviction ban for pregnant women when the overall eviction ban was due to be lifted on March 31.

This is an example of the hypocrisy of those who 'care' about women and their choices. It is clear there is a policy to push women, particularly those of a lower socio-economic background, into abortion clinics rather than supporting them after the birth.

*Yours etc.,
Lisa Maguire
Navan, Co. Meath*

Waterford parish celebrates packed Easter services

Dear Editor, Christianity is very much alive and kicking in Tramore.

Holy Cross Church, in Tramore, was packed with worshippers young and old for services on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. This may surprise many people because of the perception that religious practice has become a thing of the past for an ever-growing number of people around the country. What was particularly significant was the number of young people who lined up to pay their respects to the crucifix and received Holy Communion at 3pm on Good Friday

and 10.30am Mass on Easter Sunday morning.

We know there is a shortage of priests, resulting in some churches closing and services being curtailed, but this Easter, Holy Cross church in Tramore, was very much alive and kicking. I wonder if other churches around the country have had similar experiences, which may indicate that some people regard religion as a precious legacy handed down from their parents and previous generations.

*Your etc.,
Eddie O'Mahony
Tramore, Co. Waterford*

Letters to the Editor

All letters should include the writer's full name, postal address and telephone numbers (day and evening). Letter writers may receive a subsequent telephone call from *The Irish Catholic* as part of our authentication process which does not amount to a commitment to publish.

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters or discuss the

merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to *The Irish Catholic*, and not other publications. Letters should not exceed 300 words and may be shortened for space requirements.

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, April 20, 2023

**Faith in Film:
Discovering
the sanctity of
life during war**

Ruadhán Jones

Page 31



Properly living as an Easter People

Many of us are better at being penitential than we are at celebrating, unfortunately. As Pope Francis said way back in 2013, “sometimes these melancholic Christians’ faces have more in common with pickled peppers than the joy of having a beautiful life”.

And it is unfortunate, because we have so much to celebrate, particularly at this time of the liturgical year. He is risen! Alleluia! If we only knew the reality of what God has done for us, we’d leap for joy and dance as King David did.

Many of us are capable of working ourselves up into a suitably sorrowful spirit throughout Lent, culminating in Holy Thursday and Good Friday, but we drop off somewhat once Christ rises. This



Learning to live and celebrate this Easter season confers many benefits on us, writes Jason Osborne

is understandable – it’s hard to maintain the energy and joy that a feast of this magnitude seems to call for, after all. As Catholics, though, not only are we obliged to remain in the spirit of Easter, it’s in our best interests.

As Pope Francis also said, “If we keep this joy to ourselves it will make us sick in the end, our hearts will grow old and wrinkled and our faces will no longer transmit that great joy, only nos-

talgia and melancholy which is not healthy”. This life comes packed to the brim with difficulties, as many know better than I, but our faith isn’t here just to help us survive; it’s a gift that enables us to thrive as sons and daughters of God.

This is because the rising of Christ raises us to new life too, and it’s this that we celebrate and focus on throughout the season of Easter.

These celebrations merely

begin with Easter Vigil, which is the beginning of the Easter season proper, the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday being the pinnacle of the Liturgical year.

Thanking God

As a sidenote, it’s worth thanking God for the opportunity to attend services that suitably raise our minds to the momentousness of the resurrection. I attended a beautiful (four hour!) Holy Saturday liturgy this year, that was overflowing with the imagery of light’s victory over darkness, beautiful music and of course, and a beautiful, reverent, unifying communion with Christ in the Eucharist.

To say I was thankful for this would be an understatement. God not only allows us, but calls us to

participate in this marking of a new creation, a new birth, the culmination of Christ’s salvific action during his time on earth before the Ascension.

The vigil has always been understood as the end of the paschal season, the end of repentance and sorrow, and the end of the Lenten conversion we were undertaking in preparation for Easter. Rather than viewing it purely as an end, though, it ought to be viewed as the beginning that it is.

It is the beginning of the major season of grace, joy and thanksgiving. As mentioned, we’re often inclined to think of Easter as a once-off celebration, but it is the ‘party to end all parties’ – a 50 day celebration spanning from Easter Sunday to Pentecost.



From the very beginning of the Church's life, the feasts of Easter and Pentecost were recognised as primary, with the paschal mystery being the first celebration to have both a time before the feast of preparation and a time afterwards of exultant celebration.

“A renewed attention to ‘Sunday rest’ should be considered. Easter is a time for recognising that God has us. He did the salvific leg-work, and so we don’t have to bustle about unceasingly as though the world will stop spinning and our souls will be imperilled if we do”

The former understanding of the feast of Pentecost saw it being set off, as it had its own octave. In the new, reformed calendar, this

situation is fixed as the solemnity of the Ascension does not end the season of Easter – it is one more, special day within an entire season of celebration.

Easter candle

The Easter candle is no longer extinguished on the Ascension, but remains in a place of prominence until Pentecost, with the feast of Pentecost now concluding the Easter season. These days, the time between the Ascension and Pentecost (a week) should be spent as a time of preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit – just as Our Lady and the apostles spent the week.

“All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers,” Acts 1:14 tells us. They did this that “the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit” that Jesus promised them in John’s Gospel might find a suitable home in their hearts following Jesus’s ascension into heaven. So too must we make room in our hearts for God’s own spirit.

How are we to do that, though? How do we force celebration, especially if the buzz (if ever we had it) of Easter has already dissipated? Just to mention – God isn’t forcing

any sort of artificial ecstasy upon us. He wants us to embrace a new way of being – an Easter way of being, and there are a number of ways to move in that direction as we proceed through this most special of seasons.

Reclaim Sunday

A renewed attention to ‘Sunday rest’ should be considered. Easter is a time for recognising that God has us. He did the salvific leg-work, and so we don’t have to bustle about unceasingly as though the world will stop spinning and our souls will be imperilled if we do. This is a lesson that will need to be learned again and again throughout our lives, but it is essential, for heaven itself is the eternal Sunday, eternal rest. Take these Easter Sundays to worship God, enjoy God’s creation on a walk, read a book, watch a movie, eat your favourite food, and spend time with those God has given you – you won’t regret slowing down and enjoying God’s goodness. You might even grow as a result of it.

Reinstate the family meal

This may not be possible every day throughout the Easter season, but it is a good thing to strive for

each and every Sunday. Christ’s rising offered us, God’s children, a seat at the heavenly banquet, and few things so draw this to mind as gathering together as a family to eat together.

“Just as Our Lady and the apostles gathered in the upper room in order to receive God’s spirit upon them, so too will we receive it if we gather together in prayer”

The symbolism of a family meal is all the more potent after Mass as there God gathers us around his table, sending us forth to establish communities and fellowship in our own homes and families.

Social isolation is an enormous problem today, even in our homes, as each person spends much of their time in their own room, often leaving only for the essentials of eating and using the bathroom. Preparing a meal together, and sitting down to enjoy it together, is a concrete anti-

dote to the distance that is growing between people in many homes around the country.

Pray together

Just as Our Lady and the apostles gathered in the upper room in order to receive God’s spirit upon them, so too will we receive it if we gather together in prayer. Fr Patrick Peyton, “The Rosary Priest”, used to say, “the family that prays together stays together”.

As difficult a thing as it may be to do, inviting the family together to pray is a healthy practice that helps bring the Easter season to life, just as respecting Sundays and gathering together for meals does.

The rosary is an ideal communal prayer, but it isn’t the only one. Other countries have traditions of reading the day’s Gospel before the family meal, or reading and discussing it together at some other point throughout the day. It’s a good way to get the family on the same page for the journey through Easter from Resurrection to Pentecost.

These are basic steps, but simple is often best, and these will undoubtedly help us to live out the Easter events.

Discovering the sanctity of life during war

Faith in film



Ruadhán Jones

The Vatican's 1995 list of significant films is very eclectic, catholic with a small 'c' (meaning broad and open minded). If one theme emerges strongly from the panoply, however, it's the damage caused by war and the importance of human fraternity. I suppose it should hardly come as a surprise – many of those who chose the films would have lived through, maybe even fought in, World War II.

“The film's desire is to draw out universal themes from the particular experience of a Japanese soldier and his troop”

The Burmese Harp (1956) offers another take and an interesting new angle on WWII dramas. For a start, it's a story from 'the enemy', in the case Japan, who sided with the Nazis and waged a quite brutal war in the Pacific. Secondly, of this war movies I've seen, it's one of the most religious.

Perhaps this unusual perspective adds to the affecting drama and themes. The film's desire is to draw out universal themes from the particular experience of a Japanese soldier and his troop. One of those universals is music, hence the Burmese harp; the other is death, unsurprisingly for a war movie.

The Burmese Harp tells the



A still from *The Burmese Harp*, a Japanese war film that makes the Vatican's 1995 film list.

story of a Japanese soldier – Mizushima – who disguises himself as a Buddhist monk after being separated from his troop in the dying days of the war. His brothers in arms have been captured after the Japanese surrender and he initially intends to return to them.

Spirits

They are interned in a POW camp in Burma (now Myanmar). Captain Inouye has already taught them to sing – Mizushima is a keen harpist – and they sing together to keep their spirits up. They miss Mizushima, unsure if he's alive or dead, but desperately

hoping he's alive.

But on his way to the camp, Mizushima sees the slain Japanese soldiers lying unburied, carrion for the birds. Shocked by the carnage of war, he reconsiders his desire to head home, determined now to bury the dead.

The film begins weakly, with the soldiers singing and playing a harp as they attempt to make the border with Thailand, before an unlikely sing-song between the British and Japanese troops as the Allied soldiers captured them. But barring those early few moments, the film is a complete success and quickly moves up a gear.

“Monks gather with the nurses to sing hymns at the graveside, something Mizushima observes with fascination from the shadows”

The captured soldiers have one ambition – to get home and help to rebuild their country, devastated by Allied bombs. It's this that gives their time in prison focus. Mizushima is as convinced by the idea as anyone. He argues with a Japanese troop that's refusing to surrender, calling on them to come home and work for the future.

But then, while disguised as a Buddhist monk, he sees the dead soldiers and is moved to bury them. The film follows two tracks from then on. We get the humorous, human drama of his platoon stuck in prison, trying to entertain themselves and keep their spirits up. And you have the supernatural or metaphysical drama of a lone man burying his dead comrades.

The humour is as important as the 'serious' drama. There are some shocking images of the dead soldiers being pecked at by vultures; but then there are some gentle ones of the men singing and playing with a par-

rot. One leavens the other.

But Mizushima's story is the core. He becomes convinced that going home isn't for him; he has to stay, and begins to train to be a monk, taking part in their religious ceremonies. He has discovered a vocation. This is an anti-war film, but it's one that goes further than most by meditating on the religious significance of death and suffering in a manner very similar to Job; we do not know why specific evils happen, but all the same, we must respond with charity.

The other universal theme explored in the film is music. As I said, *The Burmese Harp* begins with a corny scene where the enemies – the British and Japanese – are joined in song. Throughout the film, music is seen as unifying and uplifting, something shared by all men and women.

It has some mystical properties, but also remains quite earthly. You have the beauty of music; you also have boys playing on the street whatever they can in order to make money; soldiers singing it in war to keep their spirits up. It's ethereal, but earthly.

The two major tropes – music and death – become interlinked in a key scene when Mizushima witnesses Catholic missionaries burying the dead from a local hospital. Monks gather with the nurses to sing hymns at the graveside, something Mizushima observes with fascination from the shadows.

Destruction

He has seen death and destruction; he has seen the unburied bodies of his brothers in arms; he has been wondering what to do; and now, he knows. It's the moment when his vocation becomes known to him and the significance of the religious ritual.

In a time when human life becomes cheapened and degraded, it's remarkable that this one soldier begins to see it as more beautiful and mysterious. That's what elevates this film to become a full human drama.

Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



St George and the dragon

St George: A man of more than myth and legend

Most of us are familiar with that famous image of a heavenly knight plunging his spear into a serpentine creature, even if we're not overly familiar with the mysterious hero it represents. That would be St George, who is venerated far and wide to this day, despite the lack of concrete detail we have on his life and doings.

George was born to a Christian family in Cappadocia around the year 280AD. Despite his name meaning, in Greek, 'farmer', George chose to walk down a militaristic path, a fate that would seal his image in our minds as one of a warrior to this day.

Moving to Palestine with his mother, he joined the Roman army, becoming a soldier for the Emperor Diocletian. The uneasy tension that so many feel when publicly professing their Christian faith today was many, many times stronger then – to the point that being a Christian was enough to see you killed.

Unfortunately, as the popular history has

this, this is precisely what happened to George. When Diocletian issued the edict of persecution against Christians in 303 – igniting the final and most severe persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire – it is said that George donated his belongings to the poor and, before Emperor Diocletian himself, tore the document apart and professed his faith in Christ. For his actions he was brutally tortured and beheaded.

While there is thin evidence for the life of St George, testimony from early pilgrims, early churches dedicated to this martyr and religious devotion to the saint leave his historical existence in little doubt. Why is it that, as a martyr, the image of St George that has most persisted is that of him as a holy warrior?

The crusades have to feature as part of the answer to this question, as it was around then that he began to be especially venerated as a military saint. The popular legend of St George slaying the dragon emerged between the 11th and 12th Centuries, and during the crusades,

it came to be that St George's slaying of the dragon was seen as Christianity's victory over Islam.

The legend itself in its most basic form claims that in a Libyan city, Silene, there was a large pond in which dwelt a feared dragon which terrorised the city and its inhabitants. To appease the dragon, the inhabitants offered it two sheep a day and later a sheep and a child drawn by lot.

The time came when the king's daughter was chosen as the human sacrifice, and as she went to her death, St George pierced the dragon with his spear. The image of St George skewering the dragon with his spear from early on became synonymous with good triumphing over evil, and is an image that persists through to today through prominent iconography.

A patron of many causes St George is most widely remembered in connection with his patronage of soldiers, and he is celebrated on April 23.

Choosing presence over smartphones this Easter

OSV News

How much time is too much time online? It's a question facing all of us in the 21st Century, as technology becomes more and more integrated into our lives. How do we balance work, shopping, reading, communicating – all the ways that we use technology – with a desire to be intentionally present in our daily lives?

“The key is to discern whether our technology use helps us deepen our relationship with God and those whom we encounter day-to-day”

In 2000, just as the internet was becoming ubiquitous, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications seemed to sense the coming struggle and the challenges it would bring. In a document on the ethics in communications, it addressed the fragile relationship between nature and modernity by reminding us: “Depending on how they use media, people can grow in sympathy and compassion or become isolated in a narcissistic, self-referential world of stimuli with near-narcotic effects.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that we're made to live in communion with God and with one another (Nos. 45, 959): it is not a bad thing to desire connection. The key is to discern whether our technology use helps us deepen our relationship with God and those whom we encounter day-to-day. If it helps us connect with people, inform our convictions, defend the voiceless, proclaim our beliefs,

or aid in our worship of God, we are using the capabilities presented to us for good. If it becomes a distraction from God's plan – if we turn to it in moments of temptation and loneliness, searching for relationship from an online source instead of God, the ultimate source – we are letting ourselves be used by technology.

If you've been over-connected for too long, your first steps to reset your use of technology can be painful: you might feel like the world will stop spinning if you can't reply to every email within 10 minutes or check your most recent social media notification. After a few weeks of a new routine, however, you may be surprised at how little you've “missed” and how much “found time” you recover for the things, and the people, that are truly important in your life.

Warning signs of technology overuse

How can you tell if your use of technology is throwing your life off-kilter? Consider some of the following warning signs:

- You have fewer deep, close relationships with people than you used to (even if you're in contact with more people than ever before).

- You often feel resentful when family, work or social commitments interrupt time spent on the web.

- You frequently text or check your phone during meals, or when other people are present – including during Mass, family celebrations, or other occasions that are traditionally times of worshipping God or bonding with the people around us.

- You spend far more time online for “fun” than you do in prayer or meditation.

If more than a couple of the

previous statements sound familiar, your internet and social media use is probably throwing your life out of balance. It's a good idea to seek out moments for “unplugged” silence throughout your routine, or re-centre yourself through brief retreats from your ordinary environment – perhaps going outdoors into nature or stopping by church for a visit.

Finding balance: Some practical tips

Changing our technology use is easier said than done – but creating any new habit is a matter of small steps. Here are several suggestions to get you started:

- Track your time. Write down the amount of time you spend online, and the activities in which you spend it, each day, or use provided smartphone data to track your use on that device. Just as studies show that people lose weight more easily when they keep a journal of all the food they eat, keeping a journal of how you spend your online time can be an eye-opener.

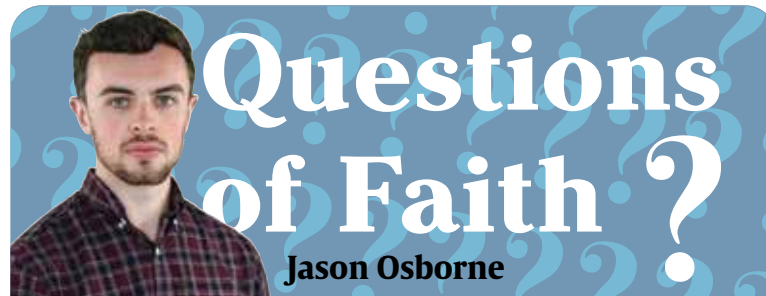
“Have I been using technology to deepen my relationships with God and others, or to avoid them?”

- Designate “offline times” and be open about them. For example, put away your smartphone when you are at your child's soccer practice or during family meals. To avoid potential tension with people who want you to be “on” constantly, tell your friends, family, and coworkers about your goal to get a better balance in your life; you may even inspire them to try something similar.

- Shut down your computer and other devices each night. Not only does this send a signal that it's time to disconnect for the day, but the time it takes everything to boot up in the morning gives you a moment to collect yourself and plan how to use your time online to its best advantage.

- Contact your friends the old-fashioned way. Make an effort to regularly call, write a letter, or visit your friends and family. Your relationships will benefit from the personal touch.

- Include time spent on your phone or other devices in your examination of conscience. At the end of each day, and before you receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, take a moment to ask yourself: Have I been using technology to deepen my relationships with God and others, or to avoid them? Has my time online caused me to neglect anything or anyone that I should be paying attention to?



Did Christ descend into hell after his death?



If you're at all like me, the Easter Triduum through which we've just passed has proven confusing at some point. We're told Christ dies on Good Friday, and three days later, he rises again from the dead. First of all, Friday to Sunday isn't three days by our modern reckoning. Secondly, the space between Christ's death on the cross and his rising, which we celebrate in the Holy Saturday vigil, seems like something of a no-man's land.

We understand the timeline from Holy Thursday to Good Friday, which sees Christ institute the Eucharist before being sold out by Judas and taken into captivity and sentenced to death. He dies on the cross, and then for many of us, we just stand around and wait until the Holy Saturday vigil or Easter Sunday.

So today we'll attempt to figure out what the Church teaches about the time between Christ's dying and rising, that we might better appreciate what we've just experienced. After all, the Apostles' Creed claims that after his death and burial, Jesus “descended into hell” – what's that about?

First, though, a common stumbling block is one I've already mentioned, which is the notion that three days pass between Christ's death and his rising. This confusion is cleaned up easily enough, once we understand that the Jews of Jesus's day didn't see days as ending at midnight (as we do) but rather at sundown. At that time, too, part of a day was enough to be counted as a full day, so part of Friday, the entire Saturday and Sunday is counted as three days.

To the second question, then, where was Christ as he lay dead and buried in the tomb? The Catechism phrases the situation clearly when it says, “The frequent New Testament affirmations that Jesus was ‘raised from the dead’ presuppose that the crucified one sojourned in the realm of the dead prior to his resurrection” (CCC 632).

Being fully human as well as fully divine, it's understood that in his human soul the dead Christ went down into this realm of the dead, that nowhere might be removed from his redemptive work.

Scripture consistently refers to the realm of the dead as ‘hell’ – *Sheol* in Hebrew, *Hades* in Greek – because its inhabitants were deprived of the vision of God. This was the case for all of the dead, both good and evil, while they awaited Christ. The Church emphasises that this doesn't mean all suffered torment – the parable of the rich man and Lazarus reveals that some were better off than others, sheltered in “Abraham's bosom” as they were (no one knows precisely what that refers to).

It was to “free the just” (CCC 633) who had gone before him that Christ descended into hell, and so the Church says that the Gospel was preached even to the dead. This was the last phase of Jesus's messianic mission, a phase that took place outside of time as we understand it, but which truly served to extend Christ's redemption to people of all times and places.

As with many of the Church topics surrounding death, our experience after death and the final things, there is a lot of mystery shrouding our understanding. Far from making us uncertain, though, we should thank God that we don't believe in the “God of the gaps” that atheists often accuse us of – a God we invoke simply to explain those things we don't understand.

Far from believing in a God of the gaps, we believe in a God who often does things we don't understand, but that we affirm as good. Christ's descent into hell as saviour and his preaching of the Gospel to those who'd put their trust in God before he'd fulfilled his messianic promise is another example of this, and it's worth meditating on both now and as we experience future Tridiums.



What really is despair?



In the musical *Les Misérables*, there's a particularly haunting song, sung by a dying woman (Fontine) who has been crushed by virtually every unfairness that life can deal a person. Abandoned by her husband, sexually harassed by her employer, caught in abject poverty, physically ill and dying, even as her main anxiety is about what will happen to her young daughter after she dies, she offers this lament. Many of us, I suspect, are familiar with these words:

"But there are dreams that cannot be
And there are storms we cannot weather

I had a dream my life would be
So much different from this hell I'm living

So different now from what it seemed

Now life has killed
The dream I dreamed."

Recently while giving an interview on suicide, I was asked whether I considered suicide an act of despair. I answered unequivocally in the negative, at least for most suicides, and raised this question in return: What really is despair? What does it mean to despair?

Despair comes from the Latin word meaning "to be without hope." Dictionaries generally define despair as a verb which means to abandon hope or to lose heart in the face of a difficult situation. I have no difficulty with that definition. What I have difficulty with and what I submit needs to be radically re-examined is how this has been understood both in our



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

churches and in society, namely, as the ultimate moral and religious failure, the ultimate sin against God and against ourselves. Despair has all too often been understood as the one unforgivable sin, the absolute worst state within which one could die. In brief, despair has been understood as the worst single thing a person could do.

Human condition

This, I believe, needs a second look, both in terms of how we understand our human condition and especially in how we understand God. When someone is so crushed in spirit by circumstance, unfairness, cruelty, sickness, pain, accident, or by another person's sin so as to be unable to find any seeds of hope inside himself or herself, is this really a moral choice? Is this a moral failure? Is this really

the worst of all sins, the ultimate unforgivable blasphemy? Sadly, that has often been our view.

“The same holds true for how we need to look at this from the perspective of human understanding and empathy”

There's an old saying that God doesn't send us more than we can handle. I accept that. God never sends us more than we can handle, but circumstance, accident, oppression, and nature sometimes do. There's a healthy iconoclasm in the title of Kate Bowler's book, *Everything Happens For a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved*. We must be careful how we understand pious expressions such as, God

never sends us more than we can handle.

The Psalms tell us that God is particularly close to those who are crushed in spirit and that God will save them. Jesus makes this central to his teaching and ministry.

Not only does he have a special affection for those who are broken in spirit, he identifies his presence with their brokenness (Matthew 25) and assures us that they will enter the Kingdom of Heaven before the rich, the strong, and the powerful. For Jesus, the broken are God's specially loved little ones.

Given that truth, do we really believe that God will send someone to hell who dies crushed in spirit, seemingly without hope? Do we really believe that God would send Fontine to hell? What kind of God would do this? What kind of God would look at a person so crushed in life so as to lose all hope and see this as the ultimate insult to his love and mercy? What kind of God would look at a person crushed in spirit and see him or her as blaspheming the human condition? Certainly not the God that Jesus taught us to believe in.

The same holds true for

how we need to look at this from the perspective of human understanding and empathy. What kind of person looks upon someone else's brokenness and sees terrible sin and blasphemy? What kind of person places moral blame on someone who through a series of tragic circumstances lies dying in a sea of disappointment, pain, and broken dreams? What kind of person would watch *Les Misérables* and suspect that Fontine went to hell?

“We need to be far more understanding in the judgments we make vis-a-vis despair”

In Mark's Gospel, just before he dies on the cross, Jesus cries out, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Then he hands over his spirit to his Father. In our classic understanding of this text, we generally explain what happened there in this way. Jesus was tempted towards despair, but he found the strength to resist and instead, in hope, surrendered himself to God's mercy. I suspect that in the end this is what most people who die (seemingly having given up hope) also do, that is, crushed in spirit, they surrender to the unknown – which is God's embrace.

We need to be far more understanding in the judgments we make vis-a-vis despair. There are storms we cannot weather!

“Dictionaries generally define despair as a verb which means to abandon hope or to lose heart in the face of a difficult situation”

Jesus enters into our deepest disappointment



Jem Sullivan

April 23, 2023

Third Sunday
of Easter

Acts 2:14, 22-33

Psalm 16:1-2, 5,

7-8, 9-10, 11

I Peter 1:17-21

Luke 24:13-35

Think of a memorable meal you had recently, or in the past. Perhaps it was a casual family gathering or a formal occasion. It may have been in a secluded place or against a noisy backdrop. We might recall the setting of the meal, the conversation that animated the group and the food and drink that provided bodily nourishment. But it's the experience of the company of others, in whose presence we enjoyed the meal, that lifted our spirits and left lasting memories. We savour such meals long after the taste of food and drink, however enjoyable, fades from our recollection.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that after their experience of Jesus' passion and death, the disciples tasted fear, disappointment and hopelessness. They'd lived through the unique experience of being in the physical company of Jesus as he walked and talked with them, healed the sick and restored outcasts to their communities. The disciples shared many meals with Jesus as he multiplied loaves and fishes, turned water into wine and enjoyed the hospitality of his friends, Mary and Martha.

No wonder then, that the two disciples described as heading away from Jerusalem – the spiritual centre of worship of God – are downcast. Jesus, their beloved master and lord, is no longer present to them. Jesus meets these two disciples on the road to Emmaus and enters into their deep disappointment and sense of abandonment. He does not issue a proclamation from



Christ on the Road to Emmaus in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Photo: OSV News.

heaven or send a thunderbolt of energy to revive them. Instead, Jesus draws near and accompanies them, talking with them even though their eyes were prevented from recognising him.

Easter story

As this Easter story unfolds the disciples enter into the great mystery of the Eucharist, when Jesus continued his presence with his disciples – then and even now, to the present day. For Jesus begins by explaining the meaning of Scripture as it refers to his passion, death and resurrection. In a kind of original Bible study with Jesus as teacher, the disciples experience the Liturgy of the Word – just as the Church hears the voice of Jesus proclaimed in the assembly. When the disciples urge Jesus to stay with them as evening draws near, they

approach the second part of every liturgical celebration. When Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the disciples, Luke tells us only that, “with that their eyes were opened, and they recognised him.”

In this moment of eucharistic amazement the disciples hear the Word of God preached, and receive the presence of Jesus in the bread blessed and broken for the salvation of the world. Jesus' real presence is the power that transforms their Easter faith. Have you made your Emmaus journey with Jesus this Easter? This is the challenge and invitation of God's word.

Resurrection

In the radiant light of the resurrection we can be confident to journey on the path the disciples walked with Jesus to deeper faith. For the Emmaus journey captures the journey

of every disciple of Jesus. Today we are invited into awareness of Jesus, who desires to draw close to us, speak his comforting word, and then nourish us with the spiritual food (and healing presence) in the supreme gift of his body and blood in the Eucharist. As our eyes are opened around the sacred meal of the Eucharist, we join the Church in praying with Easter faith, “speak to me, Lord”. Question: How are you called to give witness to the transforming presence of the risen Jesus in your life?

Jem Sullivan holds a doctorate in religious education and is an associate professor of Catechetics in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

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TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



I wasn't impressed by 'the Joe Show'

I'm frequently uneasy about the whole Irish-American thing, but I do realise how welcoming the USA has been to the Irish, and how well they effectively protected us during World War II. The crucial US contribution to the Irish peace process must be acknowledged also.

I wasn't that interested in following the extensive coverage of President Joe Biden's visit to Ireland. The fawning was rather cringeworthy, with talk of 'the Joe Show' (not *Liveline!*) and 'the Biden Buzz', though I suppose the sentiments expressed in his speeches were praiseworthy. But, listening to him speaking in the Dáil referring to "the old values" and the importance of 'dignity' I just couldn't square that with his wholehearted support for abortion being legal in the US. He also referenced JFK and "Catholic presidents", but what good is that if they don't apply "the old values" and defend the dignity of all children including those living and growing but unborn?

For these reasons it was somewhat galling to see him at Knock Shrine and addressing people outside St Muredach's Cathedral in Ballina. He's personable, and I don't doubt the genuineness of his emotion when he learned



US President Joe Biden speaks at Ulster University in Belfast, marking the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. Photo: OSV News

that one of the priests at Knock, Fr Frank O'Grady had given the last rites to his son Beau. On **The Hard Shoulder** (Newstalk, Friday) Fr Richard Gibbons, Parish Priest of Knock, described the "quite emotional" and unexpected meeting with Fr O'Grady, and Mr Biden's private prayer moments.

Family prayer figured large in **Our Supersized Christian Family** on BBC Two last Tuesday night. This was in the 'Love, Faith and Me'

series and featured Amy and Alex, Christian parents of 5 boys under 5! It was all go, with mountains of laundry and extreme challenges. In love from an early age neither were particularly into their faith but they came around to it eventually. Amy had an early cancer diagnosis and though the treatment was successful it was feared the chemotherapy had the unintended result of making it unlikely for her to conceive. They regarded it as a great

blessing and miracle when the first and then the second child came along. Third time around they were gob-smacked to find it was triplets – three more boys!

Their extended family, their faith and their faith community were the supports they leaned on and certainly it was a home full of love – and while hectic it wasn't as chaotic as it might have been. Alex worked as a tattoo artist and saw it as way to spread the Gospel, with faith-themed artwork, though some of his fellow Christians frowned on it. Amy was a social worker and found that her Christian faith helped her to be more compassionate in the role.

Their story was interspersed with other people of faith speaking to camera – dancer Ramonah and journalist Lauren stressed the importance of godparents – sometimes I think we don't give the role enough attention in Catholic circles. Rapper 'Faith Child' spoke of the Church being about people as well as steeple, while Rev. Chris wasn't so sure about whether the idea that everything happens for a reason was good theology, but the important thing was that whatever problems arose, God would be with us.

A letter to *The Irish Times*

PICK OF THE WEEK

SUNDAY SEQUENCE

BBC Radio Ulster Sunday April 23, 8.30am

Topical religious and ethical issues with Audrey Carville.

THE QUEST FOR SHAKESPEARE

EWTN Sunday April 23, 9am

Exploring Bassanio's speech in *The Merchant of Venice* and its Catholic implications, along with the literary implications of the Trinity.

BOOKMARK

EWTN Thursday April 27, 10.30pm

After a meeting with Mother Teresa in the 1980s, a congressional staffer and lawyer realises the emptiness of his life. His book chronicles a dozen years of working with this saint.

last Wednesday from a long list of doctors warned about the dangers of cannabis dependency, and drew attention to what they saw as the "unrelenting pro-cannabis messaging on social and traditional media". This skewed debate on the issue has been my experience too, and I soon got another example. The debate has re-ignited because a citizens' assembly started deliberations on the issue last weekend. **Saturday with Colm Ó Mongáin** (RTÉ Radio One) teased out the issues, but not all of them. Most contributors were somewhere towards the liberal end of the spectrum on the issue and there were no dissenting voices. Eventually the presenter asked a few challeng-

ing questions – for example, wondering whether those advocating for liberalisation or decriminalisation would be seen as letting down the locals, especially parents, in badly affected areas. It just wasn't enough. Why weren't any of these parents present, or one of the doctors who signed that letter? For example, media discussions seemed to accept it as a given that the liberal regime in Portugal is an admirable model. Others challenge this but we rarely get to hear from them.

The liberalisers just don't get the educative effect of the law.

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Film

Aubrey Malone



Epistolary catharsis segues into redemptive odyssey

An elderly man, Harold Fry (Jim Broadbent), receives a letter from an old friend, Queenie, one morning to say she's in a hospice. His immediate impulse is to write a return letter of sympathy to her but after a conversation with a girl in a garage shop whose aunt's cancer was halted by the support she received from her loved ones, he decides to visit her instead.

This is no ordinary visit. The hospice is 470 miles away. And he's going on foot.

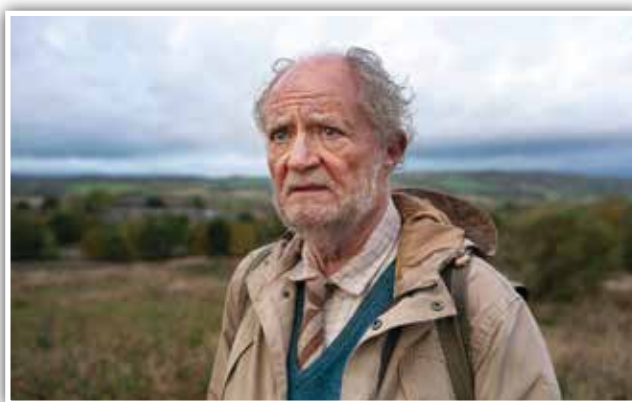
"As long as I walk," he says mantra-like to himself, "she must live". During his journey he re-examines how his life has gone after Queenie went out of it.

This is the interesting

premise underlying Hettie Macdonald's picaresque film *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* (15A). Broadbent gives it everything but the screenplay – by Rachel Joyce from her own novel – states the message too baldly.

Statements like, "Maybe what the world needs is a little less sense and a little more faith", are fine but the manner in which the people Fry meets (a man in a restaurant, a Slovakian doctor) become so immediately immersed in his predicament is too far-fetched and didactic.

The film runs into bigger problems when Harold becomes a celebrity (exactly how the media get wind of his pilgrimage isn't explained) and acquires a



Jim Broadbent in *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*

legion of disciples.

These disappear almost as suddenly as they appear. We don't see him engaging with any of them in any shape or form. They're just a random

group of people chanting slogans. The people he does engage with on his journey are unusually confidential with him. This comes across as being contrived.

So also does his meeting with a young man who reminds him of his son. Harold feels he fathered him poorly. His problematic relationship with him leads the film towards its cathartic moments.

His relationship with his wife Maureen (Penelope Wilton) is also problematic. Queenie has disturbed this for reasons I won't divulge. At a certain point of the film it becomes apparent that Queenie is really a catalyst to help him atone for the mistakes he made with Maureen and son. From this point of view, it's not really about Queenie as much as him.

He could even be said to be using Queenie to exorcise his demons. Could I be bru-

tally prosaic and suggest that he would have had a better chance of seeing her alive if he took a train to the hospice instead of 'going native'?

It's a pity so many of the film's motifs are delivered with a sledgehammer. At its best it reminded me of everything from *The Dead to About Schmidt* – or even the recent Bill Nighy film, *Living* – but its repeated condescensions to the audience grate.

Its saving graces are the final epiphany and the performances of Broadbent and Wilton. Monika Gossman is also effective as the doctor who in one scene bathes Harold's feet, thereby amplifying the film's Christological overtones.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Crying wolf for the demise of democratic capitalism?

The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism, by Martin Wolf (Allen Lane, £30.00/€34.50)

Frank Litton

“For all its faults, democratic capitalism is worth defending. But it is in grave peril” and “Democracy [in the United States] is not yet a lost cause. But it is highly endangered”.

These are not the words of a maverick seeking attention by crying wolf. We find them in the conclusion of Martin Wolf’s *The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*.

Wolf is chief economic commentator with the *Financial Times* and a well-respected member of the establishment’s commentariat. He surveys the economic and political trends in western liberal democracies, with particular focus on the UK and the USA. They are, he reports, all heading in wrong direction.

Reason

We have good reason to welcome democracy. It allows us, at the very least, to mitigate, or undo, the injuries it enables or permits. We have good reason to welcome capitalism. The free market does orchestrate the provision and distribution of

goods and services to better effect than any system of top-down planning can accomplish.

The marriage of capitalism and democracy appears to be a match ‘made in heaven’. While democracy guarantees our freedom, capitalism delivers prosperity and rising standards of living. Nonetheless, the partnership is not without its difficulties.

“The dynamics of capitalism generate increasing inequalities in wealth that translate into inequalities in power and influence”

There are dynamics at work in both that frustrate the other. Democracy works when it can resolve conflicts of interest, more or less, to the satisfaction of all. While there are always losers, they can hope to win through eventually. When, however, one interest accumulates powers that outweigh its competitors, the balancing act becomes more difficult.

That is what is happening now. The dynamics of capitalism generate increasing

inequalities in wealth that translate into inequalities in power and influence. Capitalism’s ambitions are global. The constraints on the flow of capital are reduced, international trade is loosened, the bonds that tie capitalists to the nation-state are undone, and the power of large corporations vis-a-vis the politics that would control them increases.

Manufacturing moves from its bases in mature economies in search of the lower wages and greater profits to be found in developing economies. Those left behind, blue collar workers, face unemployment, disrupted communities, stagnating wages. The rising prosperity that once won their allegiance to the status quo is no more.

Left behinds

Horror of horrors, these ‘left behinds’ or as the university educated elites who now dominate politics and the media, call them, ‘the deplorables’, vote for Brexit, cheer on Trump, and support Boris Johnson. They are the disruptive force behind the populism we see in many western democracies.

Wolf invokes Aristotle to explain what is happening. Aristotle identified three basic political regimes. Each



President Roosevelt never let childhood paralysis get in the way of serving Americans.

in its own way could serve the common good, each was prone to its own form of corruption. Royalty [rule by one] could turn to tyranny; aristocracy [rule by a few] to oligarchy; democracy [rule by many] to mob rule.

Aware of the likelihood of these corruptions, Aristotle favoured a regime that mixed aristocracy with democracy. The interest in the long term, the intelligence and competence found in aristocracy would be directed towards the common good by the constraints of democracy. It is not difficult to see liberal democracy as a version of this regime.

“Political parties no longer represent solid blocks of interest in society, their roots wither as they turn to the dark arts of spin and marketing to seduce voters”

Political parties and the civil service provide the aristocratic element. Civil servants are guided by a strong ethic of public service. Political leaders reach the top after a long apprenticeship serving traditions with deep roots in society’s divisions. Both are motivated by the ‘rules of the game’ with its

regular elections, to pursue the general interest.

Changing

All this has changed or is changing. The public sector ethos dissolves as civil servants are instructed to see themselves as managers no different from those who serve the profit motive in the private sector. Political parties no longer represent solid blocks of interest in society, their roots wither as they turn to the dark arts of spin and marketing to seduce voters.

Democratic capitalism tears apart as oligarchs intent on power and profit contend with mobs driven by the hatreds and resentments provoked by injuries, indifferent to their cause and cure.

The question: will the oligarchs defeat the mob or the mob the oligarchs? My money is on the oligarchs. After all, China appears to show that capitalism can thrive under authoritarian rule. But is either outcome inevitable? Can the dangers to which Wolf alerts us be averted?

We can argue whether or not the ‘New Right’ poli-



The United States in the 1930s depression.

Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

tics championed by Reagan and pursued by Thatcher, and here in a three-quarter-hearted manner by the now defunct Progressive Democrats, is a cause of the problems or misguided solution to deeper difficulties.

One thing is certain; its frame of reference which extols markets while evading the mutual responsibilities that attend interdependence, offers no solution. Indeed it worsens the problem.

“Here we find a proactive State respected by most and supported by citizens willing to seek their interests in the context of the good for all”

So Wolf is surely correct when he seeks a solution in the politics of ‘The New Deal’ that saved the United States from the economic depression and strengthened it for war under the leadership of President Roosevelt.

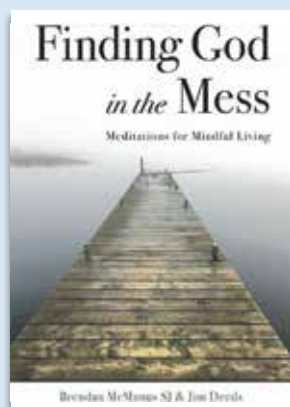
Here we find a vigorous democratic spirit determined to bend the economy towards the common good. Here we find a proactive State respected by most and supported by citizens willing to seek their interests in the context of the good for all.

What has this to do with Ireland? Our democracy is hardly in crisis. Yes, our rate of economic inequality is comparatively high and growing, but our untypical progressive taxation brings it down to comparatively low levels.

Yes, levels of immigration are high when compared with other states, yet they have not provoked the same backlash we find in many European states. Yes, the majority of voters no longer identify with a political party, which they loyally support from election to election. Our old established parties, FF and FG, weaken as they adapt to this new volatility.

But there is no evidence of disruptive populism. Is this because we skipped the industrial phase of capitalism to enjoy the benefits of the globalisation that brought the multinationals to our shore? As long as we continue to shape our mores to match their needs, as long as our governments submit to their interests, our economy will prosper and all will be well?

Searching for the still, central point of life... and love



Finding God in the Mess: Meditations for Mindful Living, by Brendan McManus SJ and Jim Deeds (Messenger Publications, €11.95 / £10.95)

Peter Costello

This is a new edition of a book that proved a great success when it was first issued in 2018, indeed it was awarded two media awards. Though it then had many readers, many today will not have heard of it, and others who read it then might like to have a new copy.

This post-Easter period is usually a period of change marking the return of a new life to the world, symbolised for some by the sudden efflorescence of flowers and trees and the return of the birds to our gardens, almost as if the universe itself was keyed into the whole essence of resurrection, not in a symbolic way, but as a reality.

So who are the authors and what have they expounded in their book? We are told a little about them. Brendan McManus SJ works as a spiritual director and retreat giver in Belfast. Jim Deeds is a poet and author and works in pastoral ministry in the Diocese of Down and Connor. But their book reveals a great deal more.

The book is organised in what may seem a very traditional way, sectioned in the joyful, luminous, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries. Under each rubric there is a concept for each day, and two to spare so speak. In between the matter is thrown back in the readers themselves by way of “Reflective Questions”.

Indeed the involvement of the reader is the essential core of the book, there is nothing prescriptive in what they say, their advice is merely suggestive of what the reader might do, think, or pray.

The book is composed so that it can be used creatively by both individuals and organisations for their own private time, and by groups of one kind and another, who can share their own thoughts about what the authors’ say, and what the readers think.

This sense of an organisational mode is perhaps just what people need. It is all too easy to avoid thinking about anything these days. There seem to be an endless horde of people proposing, one way or another to do our thinking for us. That certainly makes things easy, but it is not in the end really much help. Thinking for oneself about all aspects of life and spirit is what should activate us. And by us that could mean everyone, for it would be an interesting experience for the disbelieving and the doubtful to see how what is suggested might work out for them. Such interpretations, by those who claim not to believe anything and those who claim that they do, would be interesting to see.

All those readers who felt they benefited from the first edition some years ago cannot have been wrong. But the new readers of today will have to find out for themselves, to find too new ways of approaching the spiritual and the mystical. So, if you want to do a challenging springtime reread, nothing better than *Finding God in the Mess* can be recommended.

This note is written at a much cluttered desk on which are piled up in a messy disorder the varied aspects of this author’s life. There are those who claim a tidy desk is a sign of a productive, ordered life. But scientists have found that those with a messy desk are often more creative, certainly more interactive. They live in their own mess and thrive in it. This book shows how this is possible for everyone to do likewise.

Comments on the margin

By the books editor

The black legend of the ‘Dark Ages’



Cathedrals were a glory of the Middle Ages, a not so dark period as some say.

A correspondence that I noticed in a European newspaper recalls to my mind the long-standing controversy over the Middle Ages and just how grim, dark and ignorant they were. It all arises from the loose use in controversy of terms only half understood by opinionated controversialists.

To the historian, the ‘Dark Ages’ means simply the period of confusion between the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West – a disputed matter but 550AD would be a possible date – and the firm establishment of the emergent nation states of Europe, of which France would be an example. So there this would mean down to say the establishment of the Carolingians with Pepin and Charlemagne. By that date, 752 AD, learning had been restored, largely thanks to Irish and British monks in France, Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The Middle Ages would mean the Capetians (from 987) and the Valois (from 1328). With the Bourbons (from 1589) we pass into what these days is called the ‘early modern’ period.

But a middle age can only be defined when one has passed into a new period of history, and one becomes at last conscious of the long era between Rome and modern times. The fall of the axe in Whitehall in January 1649 put an end to the idea of the sacredness of kings. After the Restoration in May 1660, the foundation of the Royal Society in November brought the end of the Middle Ages, by

introducing a new idea of who scientific inquiry should be conducted by.

Controversialists in the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries tended to see, as many still do, an era of ‘monkish ignorance’ as a ‘dark age’ covering the whole period from the ‘Fall of Rome’ to the emergence of the modern era. They readily ignore the very real achievements of the Middle Ages, which conclude, after all, with the introduction of printing, the emergence of modern science, and the foundation of the idea of democratic rule.

But those who use the term ‘dark ages’ are actually expressing a total intolerance of Catholicism, and later of Protestantism, indeed of anything ‘occult’, mystical, or simply religious.

They are not talking about anything real. They are using terms like ‘dark ages’ and ‘monkish ignorance’ as terms of simple abuse. This behaviour should not surprise us as we can easily detect the same attitude in sections of the modern media.

Everyone should take care with the words and expressions they use. Detecting oneself in using any term as one of abuse, we should pause and think what we want to really say. We should be exact and not cloudy, indefinite and dangerous. Terms like ‘fascist’, ‘antifa’, ‘neo-liberal’ and such like, should be avoided.

Clarity of expression, and sincerity of purpose, if striven for every time we put pencil to paper, or finger to keyboard, would greatly improve the world.

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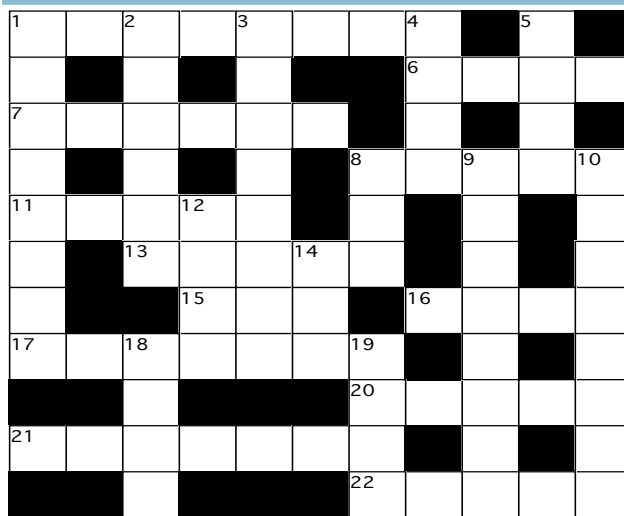
Trócaire

It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Crossword Junior

Gordius 479



Across

- 1 Water is the most important part of this ornament in a street or garden (8)
- 6 We listen with these (4)
- 7 This river flows through Dublin (6)
- 8 Beige and khaki are shades of this colour (5)
- 11 Coming from a mountainous country in central Europe (5)
- 13 The usual shape of a ball (5)
- 15 I am; you ___ (3)
- 16 A horse will move like this when it speeds up from a walk (4)
- 17 Punch and Judy, for example (7)
- 20 Make fun of someone (5)
- 21 Get ready (7)
- 22 It is ground to make flour (5)

Down

- 1 You will find one at the end of most sentences (4,4)
- 2 Unjust (6)
- 3 Money and jewels that have been buried or hidden away (8)
- 4 Close to (4)
- 5 Get bigger (4)
- 8 Evil (3)
- 9 Pass out another car (8)
- 10 Even more unlikable than any of the others (8)
- 12 You wash yourself with this and water (4)
- 14 Catch fish in it, or hang it behind a goal (3)
- 18 You might make the words rhyme when you write this (4)
- 19 Irish ___ is a tasty dish (4)

SOLUTIONS, APRIL 13

GORDIUS NO. 606

Across – 1 Add 3 Black pepper 8 Mister Tod 9 Opponent 10 Riots 11 Acted 13 Grief 15 Satsuma 16 Olympic Games 20 Scone 21 Paint 23 Abram 24 Jerpoint Abbey 25 Obeyed 26 Gerontology

Down – 1 Admiral's cup 2 Dismount 3 Bless 4 Crombie 5 Ebola 6 Plenty 7 Rut 12 Discommoded 14 False 17 Peer Gynt 18 Coastal 19 Mirror 22 Thorn 24 Jog

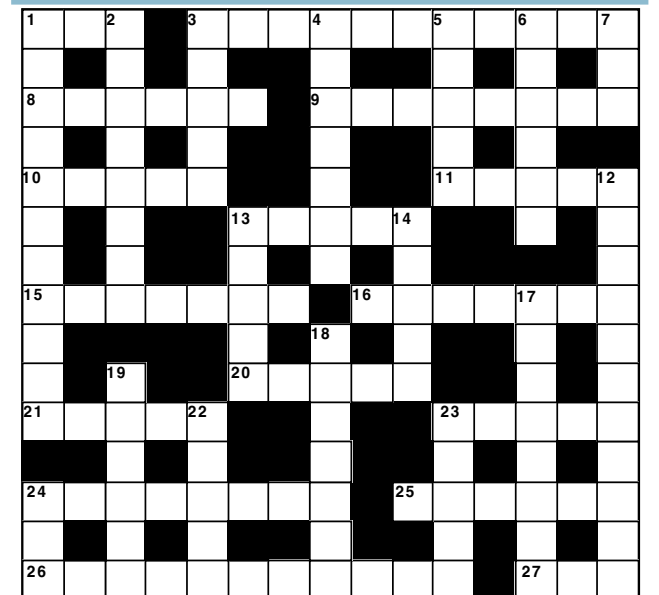
CHILDREN'S No. 478

Across – Goalie 6 Valley 8 Admired 10 Enough 12 Equal 13 Arizona 16 Lift-ing 18 Tar 19 Marker 20 Owned

Down – 1 Grateful 2 Armour 3 Even 4 Flag 5 Gym 7 Adoring 9 Relatives 11 Hen 14 Obtain 15 Afraid 17 Fire

Crossword

Gordius 607



Across

- 1 Tin (3)
- 3 Retail outlet where profits go to fund good deeds (7,4)
- 8 & 23d One form of a profession of one's faith (6,5)
- 9 Cleaned, using a machine that sucks in air (8)
- 10 Feather (5)
- 11 The backs of the feet (5)
- 13 Assists (5)
- 15 Dig up a hunter that's moved (7)
- 16 Twenty-five per cent (7)
- 20 Abhorred, detested (5)
- 21 Plant them to grow crops (5)
- 23 Dance involving many dancers in a "train" (5)
- 24 Easily carried (8)
- 25 Used one's blocking vote (6)
- 26 Cowardly (4-7)
- 27 Cover (3)

Down

- 1 Striking, easily noticeable (11)
- 2 Piece of classical music relating to the night (8)

Across

- 3 Kayak (5)
- 4 Italian dish that upset Olivia R (7)
- 5 Immaturity, or a person not quite at adulthood (5)
- 6 Shakespeare's longest play (6)
- 7 In which peas grow (3)
- 12 Lacking the necessary manpower (5-6)
- 13 In which to keep a pet rabbit (5)
- 14 Small group of specially trained police officers or soldiers (5)
- 17 Nocturnal woodland predator native to Britain (5,3)
- 18 Track and field competitor (7)
- 19 It is used to fuel a car (6)
- 22 Tiny (5)
- 23 See 8 across
- 24 Friend (3)

Sudoku Corner

479

Easy

1		4	8	7	2	6	9	
	2				6			
8					9	5	1	
	7						6	9
		1				8		
6	3						7	
	4	5	1					6
			9				8	
	8	9	6	3	7	1		4

Hard

		2		7		5		9
	8	5						
		7			8			2
			8			9	6	
	1	9	6			3		
	5	9			3			
4			6			7		
						3	2	
5		1		4		8		

Last week's Easy 478

6	2	8	3	5	9	1	7	4
7	5	4	1	6	2	8	3	9
1	9	3	4	7	8	5	6	2
5	4	7	8	9	6	2	1	3
9	6	2	5	1	3	4	8	7
3	8	1	7	2	4	6	9	5
4	7	6	9	8	5	3	2	1
2	3	9	6	4	1	7	5	8
8	1	5	2	3	7	9	4	6

Last week's Hard 478

2	4	1	8	7	9	6	3	5
8	9	6	5	3	2	4	7	1
7	5	3	4	1	6	9	2	8
1	3	4	9	6	7	5	8	2
6	8	9	2	5	1	3	4	7
5	2	7	3	4	8	1	9	6
9	6	5	7	8	3	2	1	4
3	1	8	6	2	4	7	5	9
4	7	2	1	9	5	8	6	3

Notebook

Fr Vincent Sherlock



Ready for the street...

The Easter season is a call to awareness of the early days of the Church and to be Church in our day.

There are countless and powerful stories around healings in the name of Jesus. Difficult stories too, about persecution of those who preached the word and ended up in prison, faced rejection or were martyred. Certainly, there was a lot going on. In many ways, you would expect that. Exciting times.

Lydia

Recently I met a woman called Lydia and was saying to her that Lydia features these days. She was a woman who insisted on helping the early disciples. A businesswoman, in the "purple dye" trade who would not take no for an answer when she offered to help the early Church. There were other characters too – the beggar who expected to get a few coppers outside the temple but was given so much more by people who "had neither silver nor gold" – he was given the use of his limbs and, on receiving that gift, entered the temple that, until then, was a place he begged outside of and now he stands and gives praise within. Exciting times.

We encounter Saul who, in a moment of awakening, became Paul on that road to Damascus. The persecutor became the preacher and what a preacher he became! Exciting times.

There are meetings on the shore, breakfasts shared, and encouragement given. A powerful encounter on another stretch of road to Emmaus led to recognition: "Did not our hearts burn within us?" and a hasty return to Jerusalem where the message and recognition were shared. A closed door could not prevent the message "Peace be with you" from being shared and an invitation to "doubt no longer but believe" became another launching moment. A name is spoken in tone of familiarity and the gardener is recognised. Exciting times.

Exciting time

Pentecost Sunday, our meeting point and destination, for this Easter season is at the heart of these exciting times. Pentecost Sunday, many say, is the birth of the Church. The "locked room" is perhaps the womb of mother church. In this place of waiting and mystery, there is security and chances are



the disciples had come to see this as where they would stay because they were afraid of what lay beyond the door. The door could not and should not remain closed and the time for delivery had arrived. The birthday was crucial and the world outside that locked door, like the world for a newborn baby, offered so much. There were words to be spoken and language was not to be a barrier. The cry of the newborn baby crosses all languages and says to the room "I have arrived". A joyous and welcome and necessary sound. The voice of the apostles and their companions also crossed all barriers, and each could hear the message of hope in his or her own language. Exciting times.

That locked room cannot be an option now. The doors have been opened, the Spirit has come, and voices are found. Your voice and mine, are in the now of this Easter season. Whilst the locked room cannot be an option, it remains perhaps a temptation. All too easily we could go there, close the door, and feel safe. To do so would be to fly in the face of the opportunity to be people of Easter joy, people of mission and of hope. Had the early Church remained in that room, the universal cry of the infant Church would never have been heard, nor would the mother have rejoiced in the birth of her child. That is Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the empowerment of the believer and the push we need to travel the roads in faith and with purpose.

May we recognise the voice of God in the day to day living of our lives. There is work to be done and a gospel to be preached by every man, woman and child who has been faithfully and tenderly held beneath the flowing waters of Baptism, anointed with Chrism, and created a new. May we find the words of Thomas: "My Lord, and my God." Exciting times....

As I type

President Biden is visiting Ireland and will be in Mayo within a few hours. I hear a noise outside. It is loud and close. There have been sightings of Chinook Helicopters reported recently. Not a regular in the Sligo and Mayo skies, they have been commented upon on local radio with pictures shared on social media of landings and take-offs in unexpected places. I hear this constant sound and wonder, might there be one circling Tubbercurry. As I type, the distraction becomes real, and I decide to take a look. I wonder how close it might be, will I be able to read the writing and if it's close enough, might I get a picture? Just as I begin to get up from the desk, having taken the phone in my hand, I remember Joey and the lawnmower! Alas, no Chinook in Tubber but, on the other hand, Joey is in town!



A PLEA FROM HONDURAS:

PLEASE HELP PROVIDE FOOD FOR FAMILIES AND THE ABANDONED LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY

The Missionary Sisters of Christ the Master in Comayagua, Honduras are counting on our help to bring vital food, medicine and other assistance to more than 800 people. Sister Alba Moreles Galvez has written to THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION: "We have been working in this extremely impoverished area for ten years, where families live in wooden shacks in very basic conditions. I hope that the Little Way will assist us with five programs. These are: 1) Comprehensive Nutrition. We need to provide food to three groups, as well as training in gospel values and the development of agricultural projects. 2) A group of girls live and are educated at a Home run by our Sisters. They have nowhere else to go. 3) We wish to provide food and medical aid to older adults, who are often abandoned. 4) Provisions are needed by extremely poor families, as well as training in literacy, to give the young especially a better chance in life. 5) At San Isidro Farm we hope to expand self-sustaining agricultural projects, such as egg production."

Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez recommends that we help the Sisters, whom he knows well. He asks for as much as we can send these communities living in extreme poverty.

This Lent, we urge you to give alms to our fund for the hungry, sick and deprived. Without any kind of deduction for administration, this fund is used to support missionaries providing life-sustaining assistance to destitute families and individuals.



Sr Alba writes: "We provide education, complete formation, to children and young people in situations of extreme poverty, we take care of the abandoned sick and we go where no one wants to go to evangelize."



"We can never have too much confidence in our God Who is so mighty and so merciful."
- St Therese

LENT WITH ST THERESE

In 1893, St Therese of Lisieux wrote to her sister Celine: "Jesus wills that we give alms to him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give to Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight."

The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The Catechism says: "Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God."

WELLS NEEDED

Missionaries repeatedly appeal to The Little Way for funds to sink wells in order to provide clean, safe water, the lack of which causes much illness and many medical needs. On average, women in Africa and Asia walk around three hours every day to fetch water, often in scorching heat.

Can you help provide a well?

In Lent, we can serve Christ and help the destitute with our almsgiving.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and forwarded without deduction.

Little Way benefactors will be glad to know that a Mass is offered each day for their intentions in the Missions.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

- €..... **HUNGRY, SICK AND DEPRIVED**
- €..... **TURKEY-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE APPEAL**
- €..... **WELLS AND WATER**
- €..... **MASSES** (please state no.)
We ask for a minimum of €6 or more for each Mass
- €..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

To donate online go to
tinyurl.com/lwadonations

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address